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Watchmen of the New Jerusalem: Jedidiah Morse, the Bavarian Illuminati and the refashioning of the jeremiad tradition in New England

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WATCHMEN OF THE NEW JERUSALEM:
JEDIDIAH MORSE, THE BAVARIAN ILLUMINATI AND THE REFASHIONING
OF THE JEREMIAD TRADITION IN NEW ENGLAND

BY

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BA, University of Maine, 2006

THESIS

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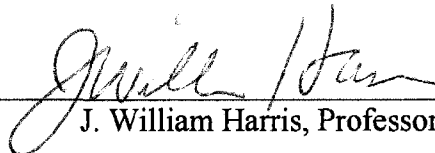
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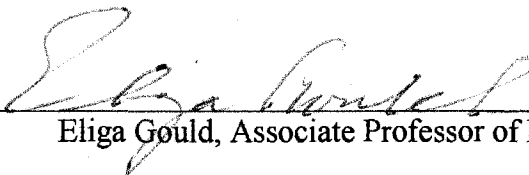
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Thesis Director, Cynthia Van Zandt, Associate Professor of History



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Date

DEDICATION

For My Parents

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The successful completion of this thesis could not have been accomplished without the guidance, insight, and flexibility of my advisor, Cynthia Van Zandt. My committee members, Eliga Gould and J. William Harris, likewise provided invaluable assistance. This thesis builds upon ideas first developed while a student at the University of Maine and I would be amiss not to acknowledge the direction and insight provided by Liam Riordan.

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ABSTRACT

WATCHMEN OF THE NEW JERUSALEM:

JEDIDIAH MORSE, THE BAVARIAN ILLUMINATI AND THE REFASHIONING OF THE JEREMIAD TRADITION IN NEW ENGLAND

by

Rachel A. Snell

On May 9, 1798, the Reverend Jedidiah Morse of Charlestown, Massachusetts introduced a threat to both American government and religion in the form of the Bavarian Illuminati. This thesis argues that the Bavarian Illuminati sermons represent an attempt by the orthodox Congregational clergy in Massachusetts to mediate between republican ideology and traditional New England religious expectations by utilizing the clerical role of social watchmen to instill a sense of virtue in the American public and guide the development of a New Jerusalem in republican America. The goals of the clergy in propagating the Bavarian Illuminati threat ultimately failed catastrophically. Although traditionally viewed by historians as reactionary and conspiratorial, the Bavarian Illuminati sermons by Jedidiah Morse and his colleagues represent a significant turning point in refashioning the traditional New England jeremiad message and the covenant message to mesh with American republican society in the early nineteenth century.

INTRODUCTION

A POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS GENESIS

The morning of May 9, 1798, the day of a national fast proclaimed by President John Adams, the Reverend Jedidiah Morse climbed the steps into the pulpit of Boston's New North Church. In the years since his 1789 ordination Morse often forcefully addressed what he believed to be the continued increase of irreligion in New England and throughout the nation. On this day, before the upturned faces of the congregation Morse began the familiar refrain in what was later described as "a soft, but well modulated and effective pulpit voice" about the general lack of virtue apparent within the nation's citizenry, "Our situation is rendered 'hazardous and afflictive,' not only from the unfriendly disposition, conduct and demands of a foreign power . . . but also and peculiarly from the astonishing increase of irreligion."¹ Morse provided his listeners with convincing proof of the irreligion he described as rampant, "The existence of God is boldly denied. Atheism and materialism are systematically professed. Reason and nature deified and adored."² The listening congregation would have found these claims along with Morse's pleas to respect and follow their political and religious leaders unsurprising;

¹ Conrad Edick Wright, "The Controversial Career of Jedidiah Morse" *Harvard Library Bulletin* 31, no. 1 (1983), 64; Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered in the New North Church in Boston, in the Morning, and in the Afternoon at Charlestown, May 9, 1798, Being the Day Recommended by John Adams, President of the United States of America, for Solemn Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer*. (Boston: Hall, 1798), 17.

² Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered . . . May 9, 1798*, 18.

they had heard these arguments many times before.

Buried at the end of Morse's sermon notes waited patiently his trump card, the threat of a group known as the Bavarian Illuminati and an incredible claim of a conspiracy aimed at spreading the misery of the Old World in the New, guaranteed to capture his audiences' attention and their imaginations. Morse wasted little time describing the insidious goals of the Bavarian Illuminati, a religious and political threat that so seamlessly incorporated the traditional fears of New England society it could have been engineered specifically for Morse's purposes by John Robison, the author of *Proofs of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies* the dubious source of Morse's allegations.³

In Morse's capable hands, Robison's description of the Bavarian Illuminati became a threat to both government and religion: "The express aim of this society is declared to be, 'to root out and abolish Christianity, and overturn all civil government.'"⁴ A listing of the sinister characteristics of the Bavarian Illuminati followed this spectacular claim,

Their principles are avowedly atheistical. They abjure Christianity- justify suicide- declare death an eternal sleep- advocate sensual pleasures agreeable to the Epicurean philosophy- call patriotism and loyalty narrow minded prejudices, incompatible with universal benevolence- declaim against the baneful influence of accumulated property, and in favor of liberty and equality, as the unalienable rights of man- decry marriage, and advocate a promiscuous intercourse between the sexes- and hold it proper to employ for good purpose, the means which the wicked employ for bad purposes.⁵

³ John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies*, 4th edition (New York: George Forman, 1798).

⁴ Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered . . . May 9, 1798*, 21.

⁵ Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered . . . May 9, 1798*, 21.

The New England public was now formally introduced to the Bavarian Illuminati threat and Jedidiah Morse occupied their full attention.

Morse presented himself to his congregation as an expert on the various insidious goals of the Bavarian Illuminati. However, his only source on the subject was Scottish professor and scientist John Robison's book, first published in London and reprinted in New York in 1798 and stumbled across by Morse in a Boston bookshop. Richard Hofstadter described Robison's book as "a conscientious account, laboriously pieced together out of the German sources, of the origins and the development of [Adam] Weishaupt's movement."⁶ Despite this factual basis, "when he came to estimating the moral character and the political influence of Illuminism, Robison made the characteristic paranoid leap into fantasy."⁷ Robison claimed the Illuminati were dedicated to "overthrowing government, religion and morals throughout the world."⁸ Furthermore, Robison claimed that "agents of the Illuminati had made their way from Germany into the Jacobin clubs in Paris and were responsible for the anarchic, atheistic direction of the French Revolution."⁹ Moreover, he claimed that branches of the Illuminati existed in the United States.

Morse echoed Robison's concerns in each of his fast day sermons. In 1798 he notified his parishioners that, "There is great reason to believe that the French revolution was kindled by the *Illuminati*; and that it has been cherished and inflamed by their

⁶ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style of American Politics and Other Essays*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 11.

⁷ Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style of American Politics*, 11.

⁸ Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 75.

⁹ Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 75.

principles.”¹⁰ Morse also despondently reiterated Robison’s charges of Illuminati agents in America; however, Morse went one-step further and insinuated that the Illuminati had infiltrated high levels of American government. Morse alleged, “There are too many evidences that this Order has had its branches established, in some form or other, and its emissaries secretly at work in this country, for several years past.”¹¹ Morse further insinuated the Bavarian Illuminati had infiltrated American government claiming, “it is well known that some men, high in office, have expressed sentiments accordant to the principles and views of this society.”¹²

Although Morse seemingly possessed a great deal of confidence in Robison’s sources and accusations, Robison personally had little connection to the Illuminati movement; he had participated in an English Masonic guild and was suspicious of the actions of Masonic organizations on the Continent in suspicion. Nevertheless, within the pages of his detailed account, Robison portrayed himself as an expert and there is no evidence that Jedidiah Morse knew the threat of the Bavarian Illuminati to be exaggerated.

The historical narrative of the actual Bavarian Illuminati is relatively simple. Adam Weishaupt, a professor of law at the University of Ingolstadt, founded Illuminism in 1776. The modern reader would be hard pressed to find antireligious opinions in Weishaupt’s writings, “its teaching today seem to be no more than another version of Enlightenment rationalism, spiced with an anti-clerical animus that seems the inevitable response to the reactionary-clerical atmosphere of eighteenth century Bavaria.”¹³ A

¹⁰ Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered . . . May 9th, 1798*, 23.

¹¹ Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered . . . May 9th, 1798*, 23-24.

¹² Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered . . . May 9th, 1798*, 23-24.

¹³ Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style of American Politics*, 10.

utopian and rather naive movement, the main goal of the order was to spread the rules of reason to the entire human race. As benign as the goals of Weishaupt's Illuminati may appear to the modern reader, many clergymen, who based their judgment of the Bavarian Illuminati threat only on Robison's account, felt the organization constituted a major threat to their way of life.

The Illuminati experienced a great deal of success during the 1780s, converting many intellectuals and political elites including dukes and princes of the German states and reportedly, philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder, author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and educator and reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. In 1785, leaders of the Bavarian government banished Weishaupt from the principality and initiated widespread persecution of Illuminati members whom the government deemed dangerous and subversive, resulting in the disintegration of the group by the end of the decade. Despite the disestablishment of the Illuminati, the order may have continued to influence Masonic lodges and modern internet searches locate numerous groups claiming ties to Weishaupt's Illuminati. Nevertheless, the historical order of Illuminati founded by Adam Weishaupt had been defunct for at least a decade when Robison's claims surfaced in 1798.¹⁴

History has judged Morse and his cohort as conspiratorial reactionaries, but this misrepresents the real significance of Morse's 1798 and 1799 fast day sermons. When viewed within the political, social and religious context of the late 1790s, these sermons

¹⁴ Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style of American Politics*, 10; Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 78-89 and 95-99. For more information on the Bavarian Illuminati, an excellent source is Trevor W. McKeown, "A Bavarian Illuminati Primer," *Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon*, <http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/texts/illuminati.html> (Accessed 16 March 2006).

represent a significant turning point in New England cultural history and a moment in time when the orthodox clergy refashioned the traditional jeremiad for a changing American society. Within the realm of religious history, historians traditionally have viewed Jedidiah Morse's 1798 and 1799 Bavarian Illuminati sermons as an anomaly within the canon of New England Congregationalist sermons, as an example of the conservatism and resistance to change that ultimately doomed the Congregational orthodoxy. Nathan O. Hatch noted, "Historians have easily dismissed the tale of a band whose political pilgrimage eventually led them to oppose what most Americans have come to hold dear."¹⁵ Jon Butler described the Bavarian Illuminati sermons as "religious paranoia" produced by "the eagerness to uncover deism."¹⁶ Alan Heimert credited Morse's "reports of an 'Illuminist' plot" with helping to "give New England orthodoxy the mold of defensive ecclesiasticism in which it was to remain nearly frozen for a quarter century."¹⁷

Likewise, Morse's contemporaries and historians since have questioned Morse's political motivations. An opinion piece published in Boston's *Independent Chronicle* a week after the 1799 fast day sermon addressed the issue of motivation,

How much more patriotic would it have been in you, Doctor, to communicate these secret plots to the district attorney, the grand jury, or any other body qualified to take cognizance of such high crimes and misdemeanors, than to retail the alarming narrative in a nine-penny sermon?¹⁸

¹⁵ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 130.

¹⁶ Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 219.

¹⁷ Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 535.

¹⁸ "Miscellany for the Independent Chronicle to Dr. Morse, *The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser*, Monday, May 6- Thursday, May 9, 1799.

Many of Morse's contemporaries immediately suspected the clergyman of using the Bavarian Illuminati to enhance his personal social and political position, but subsequent generations of historians have chosen instead to focus on Morse's religious reasons for accepting the existence of the Bavarian supposed threat.

In "Jedidiah Morse and the Illuminati Affair: A Re-Reading," historian Richard J. Moss focused largely on Morse's personal motivations. While his failing ministry and general decline in the social power of the clergy were certainly contributing factors, in his conclusion Moss placed too much emphasis on Morse's religious inclinations. Moss claimed the Bavarian Illuminati held "at their center . . . an attempt to defend the role of Providence in human and natural events" and therefore Morse's sermons should be viewed as a remainder that "mankind, humbled by the ability to truly know, must cling to the Christian religion and the guidance of moral leaders."¹⁹ James West Davidson shared Moss's religious interpretation, arguing that: "Jedidiah Morse of Charlestown led the way in publicizing Robison's theories, and he undoubtedly found it plausible to believe in such societies because they fit into the established plan of redemption."²⁰ Undoubtedly, religion and his personal situation informed Morse's discussion to embrace the possibility of the Bavarian Illuminati threat. Still the enthusiasm with which Morse embraced the threat can only be explained by his place in the social and political climate of the Early Republic.

A reconsideration of earlier sermons and later religious and political expressions show Morse's sermons to be part of a larger pattern in both New England and American

¹⁹ Richard J. Moss, "Jedidiah Morse and the Illuminati Affair: A Re-Reading" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* (1998), 153.

²⁰ James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth Century New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). 289-290.

thought. Unable to adapt to the changing cultural climate of the Early Republic, and desirous of a return to the colonial social role for the clergy, the orthodox faction of Congregational ministers led by Morse reinvigorated a longstanding New England rhetorical device. Rather than reactionary and de-evolutionary, the sermons produced by Morse and others against the Bavarian Illuminati were innovative.

The jeremiad has long been synonymous with Puritan New England, however, it seems likely seventeenth-century New England ministers adapted a medieval tradition to their New World purposes. Sacvan Bercovitch considered the jeremiad “an ancient formulaic refrain” imported from the Old World, “Insofar as the Puritan clergy were castigating the evils of the time, they were drawing directly upon the sermons of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England, which in turn derived from the medieval pulpit.”²¹ The classic definition of the jeremiad is Perry Miller’s, in his various analyses of New England Puritan thought Miller detected a society in constant tension, “they were foredoomed to the exciting but hopeless task of stabilizing it along with their inherited belief in unilateral authority and divine revelation. The history of New England, from Winthrop to Otis, from Cotton to Emerson, is implicit in these latent antagonisms.”²² This tension and the need for stabilization necessitated the recreation of the jeremiad.

Miller presented a basic formula for the seventeenth-century New England jeremiad. According to Miller, the preachers “would take some verse of Isaiah or Jeremiah, set up the doctrine that God avenges the iniquities of a chosen people, and then run down the twelve heads, merely bringing the list up to date by inserting the new and

²¹ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 6.

²² Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: the Seventeenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1939, 1954, 1961), 399-400.

still more depraved practices a ingenious people kept on devising.”²³ In contrast to Miller’s classic doom and gloom analysis of the jeremiad, Bercovitch argued one of the defining characteristics of the New England jeremiad was “its unshakable optimism.”²⁴ However, most historians agree the purpose of the jeremiad was largely social control, “the purpose of their jeremiads was to direct an imperiled people of God toward the fulfillment of their destiny, to guide them individually toward salvation, and collectively toward the American city of God.”²⁵ In this struggle to create the New Jerusalem in America, the clergy’s moral guidance was deemed as vital to the successful achievement of this goal. The clergy were responsible for maintaining a virtuous population and the jeremiad was their primary tool.

Jedidiah Morse’s sermon of May 9, 1798 exhibited the characteristics of a classic New England jeremiad, but also marked a crucial turning point in the development of the modern American jeremiad. The jeremiad did not change alone, the ultimate failure of the Bavarian Illuminati controversy led the orthodox clergy to the realization the traditional role of the New England clergyman did not fit into a new American republican society. This realization would force the orthodox clergy to find a new, more receptive venue for the jeremiad.

Just as Morse was not an anomaly within the religious world of late 1790s New England, he was also not a lone reactionary political figure. The period encompassing the administrations of Washington and Adams, sometimes known as the Age of Federalism, was a time of social, political and religious chaos. Perhaps because of its chaotic nature,

²³ Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 8

²⁴ Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, 9.

²⁵ Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 9.

this period produced a great many passionate and concerned social critics. Historian John Howe characterized the 1790s as an Age of Passion, describing American political life as “gross and distorted, characterized by heated exaggeration and haunted by conspiratorial fantasy. Events were viewed in apocalyptic terms with the very survival of republican liberty riding in the balance.”²⁶ Contributing to the chaos, former allies in the struggle against England and in the creation of the American government “now found themselves mortal enemies, the basis of their earlier trust somehow worn away.”²⁷ It was during this period of social and political upheaval that Morse first introduced the Bavarian Illuminati threat.

In the late 1790s, the uncertain success of the republican experiment, the rapidly approaching and hotly contested election between Adams and Jefferson, the excesses of the French Revolution, and the diplomatic tension between America and powerful European states coupled with, what David Hendrickson has termed the “unionist paradigm,” combined to hold the entire nation in nervous anticipation. Like the country’s political leaders, Morse and his fellow ministers were swept up in this sea of uncertainty generated by the unionist paradigm, and like the politicians, they believed they held the answer to preserving the union. Most conservative Congregationalist ministers believed a republic could not survive without a virtuous citizenry, and Morse skillfully introduced the Bavarian Illuminati threat in order to emphasize the importance of social virtue and the need for the people to follow the leadership of their political and social leaders, namely President Adams and the orthodox clergy. There is no denying the existence of a

²⁶ John Howe cited in Stanley Elkins and Eric McKirtland, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4.

²⁷ John Howe cited in Elkins and McKirtland, *The Age of Federalism*, 4.

decidedly political message embedded within the religious language of Morse's fast day sermons.

While preserving the status quo would also preserve the traditional clerical role, the conservative clergy expressed genuine concern for the future of the American republic and the welfare of its citizens. The tumultuous climate of the 1790s produced by the unionist paradigm, combined with the ideology of civil millennialism and the divisions in the Congregational fold, spurred these men to influence popular opinion through refashioning the New England jeremiad. In their desire to reassert their traditional role, it was natural for the orthodox clergy to use the New England minister's traditional tool. For the clergy to adapt this traditional rhetorical society to the new nation some alterations were required. During this period of social, political and religious unrest, the orthodox Congregational clergy faced the daunting task of creating a place for themselves in republican society. The Bavarian Illuminati controversy was a turning point in finding that identity.

CHAPTER I

HEBREWS IN THE WILDERNESS: THE RELIGIOUS CLIMATE OF 1790S NEW ENGLAND

By April 1799 the majority of Congregational clergy in the Boston area agreed, “The world is thrown into a general derangement, both as to civil and religious considerations.”²⁸ For these men both the increasing republican nature of society and the escalating success of evangelical faiths conspired to endanger their societal role. The clergy experienced “a classic case of status anxiety” during the 1790s that would strongly influence their actions during the Bavarian Illuminati affair of 1798 to 1799.²⁹

Jedidiah Morse, the pastor of Charlestown’s Congregational parish, became a leader among the conservative Congregational clergy because of his strong political connections to the Federalist Party, his education and social background, and his immense concern for public virtue and social reform. When he introduced the Bavarian Illuminati conspiracy, in 1798 Morse arose as a symbol of conservative Congregationalism throughout New England and the nation. Morse and his conservative clerical allies felt besieged by the changing nature of American society, they identified evangelical religion and democratic politics as the enemies of republicanism. However, the disunity of the Congregational church would thwart their goals of social reform.

²⁸ Ezra Weld, *A Discourse, Delivered April 25, 1799 Being the Day of Fasting and Prayer Throughout the United States of America*, (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1799), 30.

²⁹ Hatch, *Sacred Cause*, 102.

Although conservative and liberal Congregationalists expressed similar concerns about the popularity of evangelical faiths and the democratic spirit of American citizens, each faction would embrace different methods to preserve their social role and promote their interpretation of republicanism.

The religious history of New England is an often-studied topic, once dominated by Perry Miller's monolithic analytical structure as exemplified by *The New England Mind: the Seventeenth Century*. Mid twentieth-century historians interpreted the Puritan experience as uniform, agreeing that "the first three generations in New England paid almost unbroken allegiance to a unified body of thought."³⁰ More recently, historians have come to recognize the diversified nature of the Puritan faith and the Bible Commonwealths of seventeenth-century New England, while still appreciating the importance of their similarities. Just as the colonies of Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, Connecticut, New Haven and Rhode Island had important differences in their social, economic, political and religious systems, the ministers who served these varied communities were likewise not a uniform group.

The wide-ranging clerical reactions to post-revolutionary society can be attributed, of course, to the individuality of these men, but also to the different veins of political, social and religious thought that had their roots in New England Puritanism and had matured by the late eighteenth century. This analysis will be particularly concerned with the veins of thought and divisions within the clergy that would have most influenced

³⁰ Miller, *The New England Mind*, vii.

Jedidiah Morse and, therefore, by extension had the greatest impact on the development of the Bavarian Illuminati affair.³¹

One of the most important contributing factors to the clergy's unease were the divisions within the clergy stretching back in time to the Half-Way Covenant and the Great Awakening. The first of these, the Half-Way Covenant, inspired bitter debate among religious leaders in the Massachusetts Bay colony and between ministers and their congregations in the mid-seventeenth century. Richard Mather suggested the Half-Way Covenant as a means of enlarging the scope of the church, in the face of growing dissent within the colony and political pressure from England, at the Cambridge Assembly in 1648. The proposal allowed the children of baptized individuals to be baptized in the church regardless of their parent's membership status. Briefly summarized, the baptized individuals would "have all the responsibilities of covenant keeping without the attendant privileges."³² Despite the controversy the proposal generated, the Half-Way Covenant was not an innovation, it "originated in discussions that dated as far back as 1634," and some Massachusetts congregations had utilized a similar baptism policy since the 1630s.³³

The Old Calvinist faction of the orthodox Congregationalists supported the Half-Way Covenant for two reasons. First, they questioned whether one could adequately prove the legitimacy of a conversion experience and second, "the Old Calvinists took very seriously the notion that the church had the duty of inculcating morality in the

³¹ For a concise overview of seventeenth century New England history, see Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995, first published by St. Martin's Press, 1976).

³² Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 59.

³³ David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 101.

people. If it set standards too high, it would exclude people who might benefit from membership and would fail to fulfill its social role.”³⁴ In the Old Calvinist interpretation, the social role of the church was paramount; therefore, the social role of the minister was equally important.³⁵

The starting point of the diverse religious revivals and general social tumult that historians call the Great Awakening is generally dated to a 1734 series of sermons delivered by Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Connecticut. It later gained further momentum by the arrival of itinerant preacher George Whitefield in 1740. Although new to their listeners, the message espoused by Edwards, Whitefield and their many imitators bore a remarkable resemblance to the periodic, smaller scale revivals of the previous century. According to Francis Bremer, “many who had been discouraged by the staid and rational face of religion during the previous decades had hoped for a new season of grace and saw in Edward’s description of the revival the beginning of a new millennium.”³⁶ The fires of revival were quick burning, but nevertheless created a rift between the New Lights, who enthusiastically supported the revivals, and the Old Light opponents. In Massachusetts, the clergy managed to maintain a semblance of unity by portraying the New Light itinerants as outsiders, however, the cracks of factionalism would shortly appear over doctrine that led to the division of the colony’s clergy into orthodox and liberal camps.

³⁴ Joseph W. Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse and New England Congregationalism* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 24.

³⁵ My thinking on this subject has been particularly influenced by the works of *The Puritan Experiment*, Bremer; *The New England Soul*, Stout; *The Faithful Shepherd*, Hall; and *The Making of an American Thinking Class*, Staloff.

³⁶ Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 229.

These divisions originated in a series of internal schisms that had weakened the Congregational clergy during the eighteenth century, beginning with the split between orthodox and liberal Congregationalists. The split between orthodox Congregationalists and liberal Congregationalists occurred in the aftermath of the disorder and enthusiasm of the Great Awakening revivals and was largely based on theological disagreement. The rational spirit of the Age of Enlightenment greatly influenced the liberal Congregationalists; it “convinced them that true religion was a matter of sound understanding and upright morals, not of self-abasement and claims of spiritual union with God.”³⁷

The emphasis upon rational thought and logic pushed many liberals to reject the doctrine of predestination, one of the primary tenets of Calvinism. By the early national period, the liberal Congregationalists had become “firm Arminians and were drifting even further from Calvinism.”³⁸ Furthermore, and perhaps most damaging, the liberal Congregational clergy embraced the covenant of works; suggesting that men and women could gain God’s favor through good deeds. They also “narrowed the difference between believer and God by endowing Him with benevolent human attributes.”³⁹

Their disdain for the raucous evangelical revivals led the liberal clergy to avoid proselytizing altogether, and they were largely content to minister to those already within the fold. Whereas the orthodox clergy were active, if not always successful, proselytizers, the liberal clergy were decided anti-evangelical. The liberal clergy, however, were very active in educational endeavors and often received the support of their congregations. For

³⁷ Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 23.

³⁸ Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 23.

³⁹ Mary Kupiec Cayton, “Who Were the Evangelicals?: Conservative and Liberal Identity in the Unitarian Controversy in Boston, 1804-1833.” *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 1 (1997), 86.

example, Jeremy Belknap, who would spend the last decade of his ministry at Boston's Federal Street Church, published *The History of New Hampshire, Vol. 1* in 1784. In the preface he recognized the support the community provided to his historical endeavors: "the work, crude as it was, being communicated to some gentlemen, to whose judgment he paid much deference, he was persuaded and encouraged to go on with his collection."⁴⁰

Conversely, the orthodox branch clung to the traditional tenets of Calvinism and their interpretation of Congregational theology had changed little since the Puritan arrival in Massachusetts. They maintained the doctrine of predestination and the necessity of conversion experience to determine membership in a body of "Saints." The orthodox clergy also emphasized the omnipotence of God, a literal interpretation of the scriptures, and "the necessity for maintenance of purity of doctrinal and congregational integrity in the face of the rise of religious and political heterodoxy outside the congregation's bounds."⁴¹ To this end, they believed a minister's most important function was to serve as a spiritual guide interpreting scripture and theology for his flock. In this interpretation, the social role of the church was paramount; therefore, the social role of the minister was equally important.

During the 1790s, western Massachusetts and all of Connecticut remained dominated by orthodox Congregationalists. Boston, however, became the stronghold of liberal Congregationalists, whose occupation of the "big six pulpits" allowed them to accumulate wealth, prestige and power. Historically, the pastors settled in Boston and the surrounding towns held most of the religious power in the colony, and later the state, of

⁴⁰ Jeremy Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire. Volume One*. (Philadelphia: Aitken, 1784), iii.

⁴¹ Cayton, "Who Were the Evangelicals?," 86.

Massachusetts. The dominance of the big six pulpits, composed of Boston, Cambridge, Charlestown, Dorchester, Roxbury and Watertown, was firmly established by 1642 and continued throughout the seventeenth century.

In the years after the Antinomian affair, the General Court established four select committees with ministerial representation concerned with the governance of Harvard (this task required two committees), wage and price regulation, and a final committee to compile a law code. The overrepresentation of the big six pulpits was dramatic, as “fewer than one-third of the colony’s ministers and pulpits had over two-thirds of the duly authorized power.”⁴² In the early years of the colony the influence of the big six pulpits was largely a matter of geography and convenience. In last decade of the eighteenth century there was little political power left, and the big six pulpits had become mere shadows of their former significance.⁴³

Also in the late eighteenth century, the pulpits of Boston, which in 1798 held within the city limits nine Congregational churches, eclipsed the other five pulpits as the site of high culture. The distinction between Boston churches and the reminder of the colony dated to the Great Awakening. The evangelical stirrings inspired by Edwards and Whitefield that reverberated throughout the rural interior inspired few converts within Boston. Over the next fifty years, the Boston pulpits and their pastors became increasingly liberal and slowly drifted away from Calvinism.

The changing theology of the Boston churches, all with the exception of Old South, which become Unitarian, prompted charges of infidelity from the orthodox clergy

⁴² Darren Staloff, *The Making of an American Thinking Class: Intellectuals and Intelligentsia in Puritan Massachusetts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 92.

⁴³ Peter S. Field, *The Crisis of the Standing Order: Clerical Intellectuals and Cultural Authority in Massachusetts, 1780-1833* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Staloff, *The Making of an American Thinking Class*.

throughout the state. The loudest complaints came from the orthodox clergy, especially those settled in Cambridge, Charlestown, Dorchester, Roxbury and Watertown, who equated the liberal clergy's doubts about the divinity of Jesus with heresy. The lack of any concrete evidence (few liberal clergy publicly ever aired their doubts) coupled with the location of the loudest complainers suggest the accusations were founded in jealousy. The distinctions between the liberal and orthodox clergy were becoming readily apparent during this period and they came to resemble two different cultures. The liberal, Boston-based clergy were better paid and presided over congregations of wealthy and influential people who allowed them the time to pursue other interests, such as Belknap's histories. In comparison, the nearby orthodox clergy perceived themselves as underpaid, underappreciated, and without influence.⁴⁴

This rift between the orthodox and liberal branches of Congregationalism exacerbated the other problems facing the orthodox clergy in an increasingly democratized American society. Most unsettling was the lack of deference exhibited by the public for those in positions of authority. Writing to James Warren in 1776, John Adams recognized the importance of deference for the success of the democratic experiment. "There must be a Decency, and Respect, and Veneration introduced for Persons in Authority, of every Rank, or We are undone."⁴⁵

The decrease of decency, respect and veneration that had concerned Adams over twenty years earlier, by Morse's first Bavarian Illuminati sermon seemed rampant. The clergy found their social power eroded as "efforts to reassert the clergy's moral

⁴⁴ Field, *The Crisis of the Standing Order*; Staloff, *The Making of an American Thinking Class*; Cayton, "Who Were the Evangelicals?," 85-107.

⁴⁵ Adams to James Warren, Apr. 22, 1776 in *Warren-Adams letters, being chiefly a correspondence among John Adams, Samuel Adams, and James Warren ... 1743-1814*, Vol. I (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1917), 234.

authority,” including the Bavarian Illuminati conspiracy itself, “played into the hands of Jeffersonians, who tarred and feathered Yankee clergymen with the same language of tyranny and oppression that the ‘black regiment’ had coined to oppose Great Britain.”⁴⁶ Quite suddenly, the tables had been turned and the small group of clerical leaders who had once been celebrated as defenders of liberty “became subjects to the most abusive outpouring of anticlericalism that American history had known.”⁴⁷ Driven to action both by a desire to reassert their moral authority as the nation’s social watchmen and deep concern about the moral character needed to maintain the delicate balance of the republic, “ministers found no other hope but to return to a heritage which had long sustained God’s New English Israel. Amazingly contemporary and anachronistic as the same time, they sought to build republican liberty upon a foundation far more Hebraic and Puritan than classical and humanist.”⁴⁸

In creating their vision of the New Jerusalem, the clergy utilized the concept of virtue to link two seemingly competing strains of thought in late eighteenth-century New England: the millennialism inherited from the shared Puritan past and the republicanism popularized during the revolutionary struggle to form a hybrid termed by Nathan Hatch civil millennialism. Inherent in civil millennialism is the expectation of a coming apocalypse and the concept that political and social actions can influence the outcome of the apocalyptic battle between good and evil. Hatch writes, “under the aegis of civil millennialism ministers of varying theological persuasions came to do homage at the same shrine, that of liberty, and expressed their allegiance in projections of the future

⁴⁶ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 59.

⁴⁷ Hatch, *Democratization*, 59.

⁴⁸ Hatch, *Democratization*, 59.

which were as novel as they were pervasive.”⁴⁹ Although the combination of political ideology and religious theology that became civil millennialism was present throughout the nation, New England had the strongest tradition of millennial expectations, “New Englanders had for a century also watched political developments for signs of the coming times.”⁵⁰

New Englanders also remembered a long history of trying to meet the public duties required of members in covenanted communities. Generations before the Revolution, New Englanders maintained the importance of a cooperative relationship between religion and government, public virtue and public duties. Coupled with republicanism and liberalism these created a volatile mixture. In the New England clergy’s interpretation of the state of virtue in American society, the increase in infidelity and irreligion meant the forces of evil were winning. This turn of events was particularly critical to men who entertained dreams of creating a “New Israel” in the American nation.

In his analysis of the religious and political developments from 1740 to 1770, Hatch traces the origins of what he terms civil millennialism not to the Great Awakening, but to social and political upheaval triggered by the Seven Year’s War . According to Hatch, the “war with France had more lasting effect upon New England millennial thought than the Great Awakening.”⁵¹ The tremendous legacy of the Congregational clergy’s political sermons exhibits the lasting power of millennial thought in New England. “The cosmic interpretation of the conflict- God’s elect versus Antichrist-

⁴⁹ Hatch, Nathan O. Hatch “The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America: New England Clergymen, War with France, and the Revolution.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1974): 408.

⁵⁰ Hatch, “The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America,” 409.

⁵¹ Hatch, *Sacred Cause*, 5.

appeared as a significant pattern in the intricate tapestry of ideas used by New England clergymen to explain the war's purpose."⁵² Nearly a half century later, these bonds would remain unbroken in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

During this period the inclusion of political events and Biblical examples foretelling the forthcoming battle between the forces of good and evil became commonplace in New England sermons. This civil millennialism would perform a large role in the coming Revolutionary struggle with Great Britain, as "New England ministers of the Revolutionary era resisted tyranny in God's name, hailed liberty as the virtue of the 'New American Israel,' and proclaimed that in sharing these values with all mankind America would become the principal seat of Christ's earthly rule."⁵³

New England society was particularly susceptible to the forging of a connection between religious and political spheres for several reasons. Several sources influenced the development of civil millennialism. First, the conflicts with France renewed anti-Catholic sentiment in America and fit neatly within millennial theory; "These perceptions of a massive French-Catholic conspiracy were linked directly to an apocalyptical interpretation of history in which the French were accomplices in Satan's designs to subjugate God's elect in New England."⁵⁴ The distrust and suspicion of all things Catholic had longstanding roots in New England.

Congregational clergy were quick to predict that if France were victorious, "Cruel *Papists* would quickly fill the *British Colonies*, seize our Estates, abuse our Wives and Daughters, and barbarously murder us; as they have done the like in *France* and

⁵² Hatch, *The Sacred Cause*, 22.

⁵³ Hatch, *The Sacred Cause*, 25.

⁵⁴ Hatch, "Origins of Civil Millennialism," 419.

Ireland."⁵⁵ Perhaps most significantly, many considered the events of the French Revolution a continuation of the American Revolution. When Revolutionary events in France turned to violent excess, those who saw a connection between the Revolutionary sagas in each country feared the occurrence of similar events in their country. Rural uprisings such as the Whiskey Rebellion in the mid 1790s appeared as a manifestation of coming violence and chaos.

Two distinct developments after the American Revolution influenced the use of millennial theology in New England. First was the dramatic popularization of millennialism; "At the end of the eighteenth century there was enormous popular interest in the apocalyptic books of the Bible."⁵⁶ This upsurge in the popularity of millennial thought during the early republic was fueled by the drama of recent events, "Millennialist rhetoric predicting Christ's return to earth also expanded. Millennialism thrived on dramatic events, such as the episodic colonial revivals or the Seven Year's War , and the Revolution proved an efficient incubator for yet another cycle."⁵⁷

As pervasive as millennial theology was in the new nation, dramatic differences existed between the versions of millennial theology embraced by orthodox Congregationalists and by evangelicals. The majority of Christian religious leaders agreed, "that only Christianity provided the means to prevent sinfulness, promote social virtue, and hold society together."⁵⁸ While the members of the establishment supported

⁵⁵ Thomas Prince, *A sermon delivered at the South Church in Boston, N.E. August 14. 1746. Being the day of general thanksgiving for the great deliverance of the British nations by the glorious and happy victory near Culloden.* (Boston: Printed for D. Henchman in Cornhil, and S. Kneeland and T. Green in Queen-Street 1746), 18.

⁵⁶ Michael Lienesch, "The Role of Political Millennialism in Early American Nationalism." *The Western Political Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1983): 446.

⁵⁷ Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 216.

⁵⁸ Jonathan D. Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of the Post-Revolutionary New England Clergy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 57.

the church as an institution, many evangelicals preached nearly the opposite, “It was the disappearance of the church and the unmediated operation of the Spirit upon the individual soul that would mark the advent of the millennium.”⁵⁹ The millennialism expressed by the evangelicals differed from the traditional civil millennialism of New England because the evangelical vision largely lacked any civil or political dimension.

The Christian republicanism embraced by the New England Congregational clergy in the late eighteenth century placed considerable importance upon private and public virtue. Congregational ministers equated the success of the republican experiment in the United States with the meticulous observation of religious expectations, most importantly regular church attendance and respect for the clergy. Therefore, these social leaders believed increased political chaos and irreligion signaled the failure of republican government. Their certainty that only Christianity could preserve the republic inclined the clergy to embrace the Bavarian Illuminati threat as a means to regain an ordered society.

The conservative clergy led by Jedidiah Morse believed the decay of public virtue, the rise of evangelical faiths, and Democratic-Republican politics posed the greatest threats to their social power. They were mistaken; the development of rifts between various sections of the Congregational church were even more threatening. Shared enthusiasm for the Revolutionary cause and a willingness to set aside theological differences had temporarily reunited the factions, but this tenuous bond would dissolve during the early years of the republic, leaving the orthodox clergy in a tenuous position. In an effort to conceal their growing divisions and secure their social status, the clergy prescribed a new morality for a new republic.

⁵⁹ Hatch, *Democratization*, 176.

During the 1790s, western Massachusetts and all of Connecticut remained dominated by orthodox Congregationalists who significantly outnumbered of clergy than the liberals. Yale College, located in the Old Calvinist territory of Connecticut, was a bastion of orthodox Old Calvinism; and Timothy Dwight its president from 1795 until his death in 1817 would be a crucial ally of Jedidiah Morse. During the 1790s Dwight focused on the social duties of the church, therefore he identified with the goals of the orthodox, Old Calvinist clergy. From the moment of the ratification of the Constitution in 1789, Dwight corresponded with fellow religious leaders and stressed the importance of morality. He warned, “that the new Constitution, however indispensable as a purely negative system of restraint ‘will neither restore order, nor establish justice among us, unless it be accompanied and supported by morality, among all classes of people.’”⁶⁰ Echoing the arguments of the conservative clergy throughout southern New England, Dwight advocated a public role for the clergy as society’s “moral monitors.”⁶¹

A Yale graduate and the son of a fiercely religious and conservative farmer deacon, Jedidiah Morse became an orthodox, Old Calvinist minister, influenced by both his schooling and his personal religious convictions. His orthodoxy was not challenged by receiving a preaching position in Charlestown, adjacent to Boston and in liberal Congregationalist territory. Morse devoted little of his time to theology. “Of a more practical than speculative bent, Morse was responsive to the Old Calvinist concern that the church fully live up to its social responsibilities.”⁶² In particular, Morse highlighted

⁶⁰ Colin Wells, *The Devil and Doctor Dwight: Satire and Theology in the Early American Republic*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 137.

⁶¹ Wells, *The Devil and Doctor Dwight*, 138.

⁶² Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 24.

the social duties of the Congregational minister, namely to guard the moral character of society.

For this reason, Morse and similar clergy referred to themselves as “watchmen” and utilized the theology of civil millennialism to legitimate their role as social guardians. In his 1799 fast day sermon, Morse discussed the criticism the clergy had received for meddling in politics, but Morse asked,

Is this any new crime? No; it is as old as Christianity; nay it is as old as the priesthood itself. The priests and prophets under the Old Testament dispensation; Christ and his Apostles under the New; the faithful Christian Clergy in every age and every country, have *preached politics*; that is, they have inculcated subjection to civil magistrates, and obedience to the laws; have cautioned the people against animosities and divisions; warned them of their dangers, whether from foreign or domestic enemies, and have exerted their talents and influence to support the religion and lawful government of their country.⁶³

Clearly, the orthodox Old Calvinist clergy represented by Jedidiah Morse and Timothy Dwight felt they were fulfilling the ancient duties of the priesthood, but as the new century approached, they faced strong opposition from the liberal clergy and, increasingly, from the laity.

Despite changing popular attitudes and a vastly different cultural climate, the orthodox clergy clung to their civil millennialist outlook. In fact, they obstinately clung to the increasingly obsolete social role that they had not effectively filled since the Revolution. Morse complained that “for doing what only twenty years ago they were called upon to perform as a *duty*, they are now censured and abused; and represented as an expensive, useless, nay even, noxious body of men.”⁶⁴ In particular, religious leaders

⁶³ Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon, Preached at Charlestown, November 29, 1798, on the Anniversary Thanksgiving in Massachusetts*, (Boston: Hall, 1799), 18-19.

⁶⁴ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29, 1798*, 19.

like Dwight and Morse reacted with horror to the waning of deference in New England society.

Post-Revolutionary Massachusetts and colonial Massachusetts resembled each other socially only in faint outlines. Perhaps most dramatically, deference, the mainstay of colonial society, was under assault from the egalitarian spirit of the age. A transplant of metropolitan English society, in this system men considered socially inferior, those without the benefits of family, education and wealth, were expected to defer to their social superiors in virtually all aspects of life. This allowed men of high social standing to easily maintain authority in colonial society, as few members of the inferior classes considered challenging their assumed social supremacy.

During the early national period, the clergy received criticism for their continued involvement in politics, most notably many citizens disapproved of the practice of preaching politics from the pulpit, common amongst many conservative clergy in southern New England. The clergy believed they were continuing the practice of their Puritan ancestors, preserving the intimate connection between church and state. Some members of the public thought otherwise and voiced their disapproval in local papers, accusing the clergy of “neglect [to] the sacred duties of their office.”⁶⁵ In the same anonymous letter, the writer stated the clergy’s concerns over irreligion and the decrease in public virtue were misplaced. Instead of placing the blame at the feet of popular evangelicals and politicians, this author felt they should examine their own actions.

The Clergy are pat [sic] to complain of the decay of Religion; that their churches grow thin, and that people chose rather to frolic on the Sunday, than go to the house of worship; but while they reprobate the people, let them reflect on their

⁶⁵ *The Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, Monday, January 7,- to Thursday, January 10, 1799.

own conduct; probably they will find, that this inattention to public worship is in some degree their own fault.⁶⁶

Jedidiah Morse proved particularly vulnerable to this sort of criticism. Many, including his father, Deacon Jedidiah Morse, felt Morse devoted too much of his time to researching his geographies or politicking for Federalist candidates. In contrast to his father and some members of the community, Morse believed his geographies and politicking served to guide the community, he was fulfilling his role as a social watchman.

The author of the newspaper piece seems to have felt strongly that Morse was a poor example of a clergyman and increased the irreligion in his parish through his own actions,

If the parish observe the Minister busy about many things; if they find him more anxious about the *geographical* description of the City of Washington or the Georgia Lands, than the *New Jerusalem* or the *Land of Canaan*; if they find him neglect his parish on a Sunday and employ himself during the week, to collect ridiculous fables to swell an appendix to a political publication. If he will do these things, he must expect that his flock will not increase.⁶⁷

The writer advised Morse and his conservative cohorts to “not be surprised if some of his *own sheep* have strayed across the river, and become the care of a more attentive shepherd.”⁶⁸ The majority of clerical readers must have reacted in shock to the condemnation of a clergyman by a lay observer, especially in an instance where they believed they were fulfilling their traditional social role. Prior to the Revolution, the majority of New Englanders deemed public criticism of the clergy socially inappropriate, but in this new social climate of declining deference, the clergy became subject to public disapproval in the papers and elsewhere.

⁶⁶ *The Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, January 7- January 10, 1799.

⁶⁷ *The Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, January 7- January 10, 1799.

⁶⁸ *The Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, January 7- January 10, 1799.

Social change was not the only factor affecting the Congregational clergy's decisions and actions during the last years of the eighteenth century. Although concern for their social role and the diminishment of their personal power preoccupied the clergy, the strong emphasis they placed on the intimate relationship between religion and politics, which now faced criticism, had deep roots in Puritan traditions. The clergy's use of civil millennialism during the years leading up to and during the American Revolution emphasized the political and social role of the clergy. During the Revolutionary crisis especially, the clergy had bridged political thought and religious doctrine. This role contained similarities to the traditional role held by the clergy; the chaos of the period only increased the importance of the clergy's social role as social watchmen. During the 1790s, an era of extreme political and social chaos, New Englanders naturally turned to the past for guidance and to their religious leaders, the men who stood to lose their traditional role and source of power.

Two increasingly popular groups in late eighteenth-century New England posed the greatest challenge to the traditional cultural hegemony of the Congregational clergy. One was the Democratic-Republican societies, and the other the evangelical sects, including the Baptists who had long been a thorn in the side of the established clergy and the more recently arrived Methodists. As historian Richard Hofstadter explained, the threat posed by the Democratic-Republican societies was largely political, and in some regions of the new nation, "a few Democratic-Republican societies were widely believed to be Jacobinical and to have instigated the Whiskey Rebellion."⁶⁹

These vocal social critics filled the pages of numerous sermons with warnings against the politicians they believed composed the democratic-republican societies. In

⁶⁹ Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style of American Politics*, 13-14.

July of 1799, Jedidiah Morse advised the students of Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, to be wary of the present state of society.

In the present disorganized state of society in general, your temptations will be numerous, and your dangers great. You will have need, therefore, to be strongly fortified against that infidel and insidious philosophy which has produced such extensive havoc and desolation on the principles and morals of mankind.⁷⁰

Although their battle against the Democratic-Republican societies would continue, another foe presented a greater challenge.

The decline of deference and the rise of popular democratic organizations are examples of a striking change in American society, however, where the increase of republican ideology most threatened clerical status was in the increase of popular evangelical sects. Historically, Baptists had challenged Congregational dominion in southern New England since the Great Awakening. When divisions caused by the competing theologies of the Great Awakening allowed Baptists to gain a foothold in New England. This explosive growth continued through the century and showed “no signs of abating in the early republic.”⁷¹ During the nineteenth century, Methodists would also enjoy rapid growth in this region. In the turbulent years of the early republic, the stagnation of Congregational churches caused the conservative clergy to view any sect practicing successful conversion as a threat. The anti-elitism of the popular evangelicals fueled the fire of an already growing controversy.

Inherent in the popular success of evangelical sects, such as the Baptist and Methodists, was a denunciation and criticism of the elite, educated ministers who had dominated New England religion since its inception. One of the foremost premises of the

⁷⁰ Jedidiah Morse, *An Address to the Students at Phillips Academy Delivered July 9, 1799*, (Charlestown: Samuel Etheridge, 1799), 12.

⁷¹ Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness*, 27.

evangelical sects was the assumption that common people could interpret the Bible independent of their minister's guidance. Congregational ministers in Massachusetts abhorred the "religious assault on well-bred and high-toned culture," which seemed a direct threat to their social role.⁷²

The social watchmen role of the New England clergy dated to the founding of Massachusetts Bay Colony. As social watchmen, "ministers were responsible for being on the lookout for divine warnings and, when they appeared, for bringing the people together for a diagnosis of their spiritual ills and for corrective action."⁷³ In 1673, for example, Increase Mather addressed the growing sin of drunkenness within the town of Boston. In his introductory remarks, he insisted that "the Lord has set me as a watchman, and charged me to blow the trumpet, that sinners may have warning of their danger."⁷⁴ Implicit in this definition and in keeping with Puritan theology, is the assumption ordinary people were incapable of interpreting God's message. Therefore, the clergy were largely responsible for the establishment of the New Jerusalem by ensuring the people heeded God's warning and maintained their part of the covenant through their righteous behavior.

The Congregational clergy were accustomed to interpreting not only religious theology, but also political and social events in New England. They perceived themselves to be in a position of moral oversight; in fact, many came to view the ministry as a public office, "[which] had particular responsibility for the preservation of social order."⁷⁵

⁷² Hatch, *Democratization*, 21.

⁷³ Stout, *The New England Soul*, 28.

⁷⁴ Increase Mather, *Woe to drunkards. Two sermons testifying against the sin of drunkenness: wherein the woefulness of that evil, and the misery of all that are addicted to it, is discovered from the word of God.* (Cambridge, MA: Marmaduke Johnson, 1673), A2.

⁷⁵ Donald M. Scott quoted in Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness*, 59.

Although the clergy strove to maintain this position in the New Republic, increasingly public sentiment opposed their actions. The two pillars that had traditionally supported the domination of the Congregational clergy, deference and the established church, were under attack from all sides, and evangelicals often led the assault.

The evangelical opposition to the established church in Massachusetts and Connecticut outspokenly criticized the Congregational clergy as ignorant, indolent and above all as covetous. Methodist itinerant John Leland, for instance, delivered a sermon in Connecticut entitled *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable* shortly after his return from Virginia in 1791. Leland was a staunch admirer of the Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom penned by Thomas Jefferson.

Within the pages of his discourse, Leland condemned the practice of educated ministers interpreting the Bible for the masses. Leland questioned the justice of this arrangement, “Were not the learned clergy (the scribes) his [Jesus’] most inveterate enemies?”⁷⁶ Leland not only insinuated that the learned clergy were superfluous, but also depicted them as the successors of Christ’s enemies. Leland criticized the conservative Congregational clergy for espousing politics from the pulpit and desiring a tax supported salary. Thus, Leland and his evangelical cohorts threatened the social power structure of Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Since the founding, the Puritans and their successors had battled a series of evangelical sects intent on overthrowing Puritan hegemony, beginning with the Baptists and Quakers. Until the late eighteenth century, the united Congregational clergy largely succeeded in marginalizing the evangelicals in their midst. After the American

⁷⁶ John Leland, “The Rights of Conscience Inalienable,” (1791) in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 1090.

Revolution, the evangelicals experienced a surge in popularity because their message matched the national mood. In a period of intense conflict and change, evangelical Protestantism provided people with a sense of stability. In many respects, Congregationalism and the increasingly mainstream evangelical sects, including the Methodists and Baptists, were quite similar. Congregationalism shared a central tenet with most evangelical denominations, the idea “that the sinful person had to come to an acceptance of Christ as a redeemer through a conversion experience.”⁷⁷ However, two important distinctions ensured the orthodox clergy would continue to fight the evangelical presence.

First, the presence of evangelical denominations challenged the unity of the New England church, in the clergy’s eyes the Congregational church. From the orthodox point of view, “all these denominations divided the people and deprived them of the opportunity to meet as a united community and to obtain the edifying social guidance” of the orthodox social watchmen.⁷⁸ Without the undivided attention of all members of society, how could the clergy oversee the establishment of the New Jerusalem?

Secondly, the anti-elitism characteristic of nearly all the evangelical sects, openly challenged the cultural domination of the clergy. To the evangelical preachers with their Revolutionary outlook, “nothing represented ecclesiastical tyranny more than the Calvinist clergy, with their zeal for theological systems, doctrinal correctness, organizational control, and cultural influence.”⁷⁹ The evangelical leaders advocated the opposite of the social watchmen role for the clergy, “All of these movements challenged

⁷⁷ Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 5.

⁷⁸ Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 65.

⁷⁹ Hatch, *Democratization*, 170.

common people to take religious destiny into their own hands, to think for themselves, to oppose centralized authority and the elevation of the clergy as a separate order of men.”⁸⁰

Morse repeatedly refuted this depiction of the clergy as disconnected from the needs of the people. In May 1798 he questioned, “Can it be said, with truth, that they [the clergy] are unfriendly to the rights and interests of the people?”⁸¹ In Morse’s portrayal, the clergy were publicly maligned because of their efforts to preserve independence and the republic. Morse declared the clergy’s continued battle against “*the hostile designs and insidious aims of the French Government,*” and their evil emissaries the Bavarian Illuminati, to be “the true cause of the present warfare against the American clergy.”⁸²

Morse and his colleagues found themselves engaged in a battle for public opinion, a battle they were clearly losing during the 1790s. The clergy were dismayed to discover that evangelical itinerants were encouraging the people to think for themselves on theological matters. Even liberal Congregational clergy, such as William Bentley of Salem, Massachusetts, who would later challenge the authenticity of Morse’s Illuminati claims, found the idea unacceptable, “What Bentley found most appalling was that ‘the rabble’ not only noised abroad strange doctrine but actually went beyond what they were told in the attempt ‘to explain, commend and reveal’ religious matters. The people, he groaned, were doing theology for themselves.”⁸³

The situation reminded the New England clergy of the early years of colonial settlement and the actions of Anne Hutchinson. William Bentley recorded in his diary his

⁸⁰ Hatch, *Democratization*, 58.

⁸¹ Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered . . . May 9th, 1798*, 19.

⁸² Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon Exhibiting the Present Dangers, and Consequent Duties of the Citizens of the United States of America. Delivered at Charlestown, April 25, 1799, the Day of the National Fast*. (Charlestown: Etheridge, 1799), 21.

⁸³ Hatch, *Democratization*, 21.

reaction to lay persons attending meetings, and “as in Mother Hutchinson’s time not only tell what they hear but attempt to explain, to condemn and reveal such things as these with which their noodle’s stored. And with all this not the smallest improvement is made in the public morals.”⁸⁴ Once again, inferior and unqualified individuals were interpreting scripture.

Furthermore, New England’s Congregational clergy found the notion of a separation between church and state inconceivable. Puritan theology emphasized an intimate relationship between church and state, particularly in the influential doctrine of civil millennialism. Accustomed to their usual role and spurred to greater action by the ideologies of the American Revolution, the clergy hoped to assume a greater role in post-Revolutionary American society. During the 1790s, Jedidiah Morse sought to enlarge the role of the parish minister.

An avid geographer, Morse wanted not only to chart the expansion of the new nation, he also wanted to shape it. In his major work, *The American Geography*, “He assigned the clergy a large role in maintaining Connecticut’s happiness by serving ‘as a check upon the overbearing spirit of republicanism.’”⁸⁵ He even suggested that when ministers preached the annual election sermons in the New England states, they should submit histories of the events of the past year for reference in settling any political disputes and preventing the rise of political factions.”⁸⁶ However, the majority of the American citizenry were no longer willing to allow religious elites to interpret political events for them.

⁸⁴ William Bentley, William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D., Pastor of the East Church, Salem, Massachusetts, Volume 3*. (Salem, MA: The Essex Institute, 1905), 271.

⁸⁵ Jedidiah Morse, *The American Universal Geography* (Boston, 1793) quoted in Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 32.

⁸⁶ Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 32.

Understandably, many in American society found the 1790s marked by a great deal of turmoil. At this point, American republican government was little more than an experiment and no one was sure whether the experiment would be successful. While the instability of the political and economic systems created a large amount of societal stress, the changing cultural climate had the most severe repercussions in the relationship between the clergy and their congregations.

The ideals of the Revolution influenced both the clergy and the members of their churches; however, they interpreted the impact of these ideals very differently. For the masses, republicanism and liberalism completely redefined their conception and their place in American society. They developed a new sense of their self worth, and “Above all, the Revolution dramatically expanded the circle of people who considered themselves capable of thinking for themselves about issues of freedom, equality, sovereignty, and representation.”⁸⁷ The ideals of popular sovereignty and the voice of the people codified in the Constitution expounded these ideas, “The correct solution to any important problem, political, legal, or religious, would have to appear to be the people’s choice.”⁸⁸ It seems a reasonable interpretation that, if the people were the deciding authority in legal and political matters, why could they not reach independent conclusions about religion?

The orthodox clergy faced a crisis with this effective repudiation of their traditional societal role. Through their support of the Revolution and Constitution, most ministers had anticipated an important role in shaping the new society forming around them. The Congregational clergy “were most deeply committed to the project of the new United States” and had envisioned a continued, if not expanded, role as societal

⁸⁷ Hatch, *Democratization*, 6.

⁸⁸ Hatch, *Democratization*, 6.

watchmen.⁸⁹ However, this expectation did not fit into the role republican citizens envisioned for their ministers. After the Revolution, New England's established ministry found themselves suddenly thrust into a new religious arena, and "Congregationalists accustomed to state recognition . . . were forced willy-nilly, to adjust. More than simply adjusting, they now had to compete for souls, for public allegiance, and for intellectual commitment."⁹⁰ Despite this new set of challenges, the conservative New England ministry was unwilling to discard their visions of a religious and republican utopia in the United States; furthermore, they were unwilling to give up their role in forming this utopia.

Nathan Hatch articulated the challenges faced by the conservative clergy in *The Democratization of American Christianity*. These challenges resulted from the increasingly republican nature of society. "In such a society the elites could no longer claim to be adequate spokesmen for the people in general. In this climate, it took little creativity for some to begin to reexamine the social function of the clergy and to question the right of any order of men to claim authority to interpret God's Word."⁹¹ The clergy faced the difficult task of proving their usefulness to society and the necessity of their traditional role in this new republican society. Unfortunately, for the clergy, the developing society of the 1790s in no way resembled the society the clergy had envisioned.

Americans were beginning to emphasize new ideals, as "in the early years of the new nation . . . evolution was away from a republicanism defined largely by civic

⁸⁹ Mark A. Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 253.

⁹⁰ Noll, *America's God*, 257.

⁹¹ Hatch, *Democratization*, 24.

humanism, with ideals of disinterested public virtue and freedom defined as liberation from tyranny.”⁹² Increasingly, the new definition of republicanism emphasized “ideals of individualized private virtue and freedom defined as self-determination,” making the traditional clerical role increasingly obsolete.⁹³ The changing concept of virtue is key to their understanding of the threats they faced. Through each fast day, thanksgiving, and election sermon, conservative clergy railed against the state of virtue in the new nation. In the minds of the religious elite, the means of influencing the morals of society lay in the connection between virtue and piety. Morse and other members of the conservative Congregational faction feared this new social ideal did not align with the traditional principles of New England religion.

Perhaps the conservative Congregational clergy in Southern New England were more concerned with the moral welfare of their society than their counterparts in other states. The unique bond formed between Puritan theology and republican ideology in the years leading up to and during the American Revolution contributed to this seemingly illogical anxiety. Their society accustomed to identifying present events with Biblical narratives, many pious New Englanders believed they were citizens of the New Jerusalem. Continuing the Biblical imagery used to describe the Revolutionary struggle, New Englanders now applied similar themes to the social development of the New Republic; “Having watched the divine wonders against ‘Pharaoh’ and having quickly taken up arms to overthrow ‘Egypt,’ New Englanders knew that their perilous experiment, now in the wilderness, depended on nothing but their own moral fitness.”⁹⁴

⁹² Noll, *America's God*, 210.

⁹³ Noll, *America's God*, 210.

⁹⁴ Hatch, *Sacred Cause*, 120.

While New Englanders continued to adhere to the principles of republicanism shared by all American citizens up and down the eastern seaboard, they retained their own unique interpretation, which “often reflected perceptions of the republic as a commonwealth, virtue as piety and benevolence, vice as sin, and liberty as an opportunity to do what is right.”⁹⁵ Hence, the New England version of republicanism was different from those espoused in other regions of the United States. The great emphasis placed on the need for a virtuous (that is, pious) citizenry and leadership can be traced to the theological and political development of colonial New England.

Jedidiah Morse addressed his personal concerns over the proposed separation of church and state in a thanksgiving sermon delivered before the Massachusetts legislature in 1798. After allowing his announcement of the Bavarian Illuminati threat to religion and government percolate through the fall and summer months, Jedidiah Morse again addressed the theme of virtue and republicanism. While his 1798 Thanksgiving sermon stressed the danger posed by the Illuminati, he also devoted much of his oration to the importance of public virtue. Looking down upon the upturned faces of his listeners, Morse chided them for their immoral behavior. “Party zeal and animosities have, in some instances, marred our happiness. Prejudices have too often blinded the eyes of the mind against the perception of truth.”⁹⁶ True to his desired role as a moral compass for his community, Morse imparted advice that culminated two decades of hard work by the Congregational ministry.

The connection between virtue and republican government voiced by Morse that November morning was the offspring of Congregational Revolutionary rhetoric,

⁹⁵ Hatch, *Sacred Cause*, 120.

⁹⁶ Morse, *A Sermon . . . November 29, 1798*, 9.

“Christianity sheds a most benign and salutary influence on society.”⁹⁷ He explained “it ‘teacheth us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. It prohibits the indulgence of those appetites and desires *only*, which cannot be satisfied without impairing the happiness of others. It is highly friendly to genuine liberty.”⁹⁸ Throughout the clerical campaign of 1798 and 1799, conservative clergy in southern New England echoed these themes.

Southern New England’s conservative religious leaders sought to reestablish the cooperative relationship between church and state, religion and government. Historian Jonathan Sassi succinctly described the goals of the conservative Congregational clergy in *A Republic of Righteousness: the Public Christianity of the Post-Revolutionary New England Clergy*; “by teaming up with society’s civil leadership, the ministry hoped to inculcate Christian virtue and suppress vice. Because vice and irreligion were so intertwined, an approach was needed for both problems.”⁹⁹ The Congregational church continued to support a close alliance between church and state throughout the early national period, although their determined support of establishment seemed out of touch with republican society. The clergy believed that a close working relationship between church and state was essential, a relationship they deemed necessary for the experiment of republicanism to prove successful. They may also have been aware, of course, that the removal of required tax support would seriously injure the Congregational church.

Throughout the 1790s and beyond, the clergy tenaciously clung to establishment as a means of preserving republican government in America. In Massachusetts and Connecticut especially, the clergy eloquently supported the Congregational church’s tax-

⁹⁷ Morse, *A Sermon . . . November 29, 1798*, 25.

⁹⁸ Morse, *A Sermon . . . November 29, 1798*, 25.

⁹⁹ Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness*, 60.

sustained status. In an Election Day sermon preached before Massachusetts governor John Hancock, lieutenant governor Samuel Adams and the state legislature, David Tappan delineated the differences of “cooperation from unjustifiable melding of church and state.”¹⁰⁰ Tappan, the Harvard educated son of a Congregational minister, was the pastor of the Newbury Congregational church. A member of the orthodox, Old Calvinist, conservative faction, Tappan stressed the appropriate relationship between religion and government. Tappan claimed the orthodox clergy did not support a theocracy, characterizing a too-close relationship between minister and magistrate as “motley alliances” and the main pillar of both civil and religious tyranny; and the course of infinite mischiefs to the intellectual and moral character as well as the temporal condition of mankind.”¹⁰¹

In sermon after sermon, the orthodox Old Calvinist clergy sought to prove that they were embracing the ideals of Revolution, even as they pressed for continued state support. As the decade progressed, their fast and election day sermons in particular took on the jeremiad form. In their double quest to maintain their social function and the religious establishment, they stressed their embrace of republicanism and tried to convey their brand of virtue and republican society. Furthermore, the orthodox clergy sought to portray themselves as defenders of American independence. The orthodox clergy echoed the ideals of the American Revolution from their pulpits and declared themselves defenders of liberty, “May liberty of conscience, in this land, be never violated.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness*, 60.

¹⁰¹ David Tappan, “A Sermon for the Day of General Election,” (1792) in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 1114.

¹⁰² Lewis, *The political advantages of godliness*, 26.

The theory of virtue was essential to the New England clergy's concept of Revolutionary political ideals. Virtue acted as the linchpin connecting republican ideals and Puritan religious traditions. Furthermore, the clerical emphasis on the connection between a virtuous citizenry and a successful republican government was largely responsible for their concern over the morals of society. After the war, however, the development of differing interpretations of the ideal republican society created tensions between vastly different definitions of virtuous citizenry.

The New England clergy identified public virtue as essential to the continued existence of republican government, while insisting that corruption would surely destroy it. Several weeks after Jedidiah Morse delivered his fast day sermon discussing the Bavarian Illuminati, Timothy Dwight picked up the theme of virtue in a sermon preached before the Connecticut Society of Cincinnati and later published at the organization's request. Dwight's address provided a definition of virtue compatible with the theology and expectations of the orthodox, Old Calvinist clergy.

Dwight defined virtue as "The love of doing good . . . It ought to be observed, that it is not a passion, nor an aggregate of passions; but a principle, or disposition, habitual, active, and governing. It is the mental energy, directed steadily to that which is right."¹⁰³ The virtue expounded by Dwight and his allies was elusive and retained similar characteristics to the covenanted community idealized by the early Puritans. Maintaining a virtuous citizenry, placing the common good ahead of personal gain and following carefully the dictates of civil and religious leaders was the duty of Christians in the New Republic.

¹⁰³ Timothy Dwight, *The True Means of Establishing Public Happiness: A Sermon Delivered, the 7th of July 1795*, (New Haven: T&S Green, 1795), 14.

In their public addresses, the orthodox clergymen presented the dangerous consequences of social upheaval. Abiel Holmes, pastor of the First Church in Cambridge, warned against “the natural effects of national despondency” in his 1799 fast day sermon.¹⁰⁴ Speaking before two congregations, Holmes laid out the grave threat posed by national licentiousness and immorality. “The combined forces of the State” he proclaimed, “will be incapable of being brought into decisive operation. The supineness and timidity of the people will be discovered by the enemy, which must now perceive itself invited to an easy conquest.”¹⁰⁵ The community-focused virtue espoused by conservative Congregationalists in New England directly contrasted with the individual liberty supported by the Jeffersonians and the evangelicals.

For the clergy to ensure the virtuous nature of the citizenry, the citizens must attend public worship on a regular basis. The sermons of the period almost always berate the public for irreligion and breaking the Sabbath, which would have been criminal offenses earlier in the century and now remained largely ignored by authorities. Whether large parts of the population had ceased attending church entirely, or whether many worshippers abandoned the Congregational fold for evangelical denominations, is difficult to ascertain.

Two facts, however, are clear. First, the church membership of many Congregational churches began declining during the 1790s throughout New England. The home parish of Jedidiah Morse in Charlestown serves as an example. When Morse assumed leadership of the congregation in 1789, the number of members stood at one hundred and thirty-five; about a decade later in 1800, the church had gained fewer than

¹⁰⁴ Abiel Holmes, *A Sermon Preached at Brattle-Street Church . . . April 25, 1799, the Day Appointed by the President of the United States for a General Fast*, (Boston: Young & Minns, 1799), 14.

¹⁰⁵ Holmes, *A Sermon Preached at Brattle Street Church*, 14.

ten members. Particularly ominous for Morse and his colleagues, “this lack of growth in his congregation contrasted sharply with a rapid increase in the Charlestown population.”¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, the evangelical population grew.

During the social and political upheaval of the 1790s, the orthodox, Old Calvinist clergy could not accept nor adapt to a changing society. Likewise, they could not comprehend the criticism levied at them by evangelical leaders and the Democratic-Republican press. The emphasis the orthodox clergy placed upon virtue and civil millennialism meant they were seriously concerned for the moral welfare and future existence of the American nation, but they also felt personally attacked. As Morse noted, “the apparently systematic endeavors made to destroy, not only the influence and support, but the official existence of the Clergy” required strenuous rejection.¹⁰⁷ Beset from all sides, the stage was set for a spectacular battle and the orthodox clergy intended to use the refashioned jeremiad as their primary weapon.

¹⁰⁶ Moss, “Jedidiah Morse and the Illuminati Affair, 142.

¹⁰⁷ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29, 1798*, 17.

CHAPTER II

“THE DEMORALIZING PRINCIPLES OF A FOREIGN NATION:” THE POLITICAL PRECONDITIONS OF THE BAVARIAN ILLUMINATI THREAT

The political situation of the 1790s provides an essential context for exploring the significance of the Bavarian Illuminati controversy. The social climate alone did not lead to Morse's enthusiastic propagation of the Bavarian Illuminati threat; the orthodox clergy's perception of their increasing political marginality also pushed them into the pulpit. The Bavarian Illuminati sermons mark the orthodox clergy's attempts to reassert their role as social watchmen in the political arena through reinvigorating the jeremiad tradition. They viewed political commentary as a traditional and appropriate function for the clergy. Furthermore, they claimed political preaching had been as essential function of the clergy since the dawn of Christianity: “the priests and prophets under the Old Testament dispensation; Christ and his apostles under the New; the faithful Christian clergy in every age and every country, have *preached politics*.”¹⁰⁸

Morse described the role of the clergy in politics as advisory, but nevertheless essential, claiming the clergy “cautioned the people against animosities and divisions, warned them of their dangers, whether from foreign or domestic enemies, and have exerted their talents and influence to support the religion and lawful government of their country.”¹⁰⁹ This advisory role was essential to the New England jeremiad tradition and

¹⁰⁸ Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25th*, 1799, 18-19.

¹⁰⁹ Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25th*, 1799, 19.

largely responsible for the name jeremiad, “the central element in the American Puritan configuration was the analogy between New England and latter-day Israel in the prophetic period before the Exile- in covenant with [the] Lord as his chosen people, but decaying in spirit and liable to ever more severe chastisements.”¹ Once more, the inhabitants of New England perceived a similarity between their present situation and the Biblical narrative of the Israelites.

It is no mistake that Jedidiah Morse and his colleagues chose the jeremiad to address their endangered society. They believed the future of the American republic was as perilous as the future foretold to the inhabitants of Jerusalem by the biblical prophet Jeremiah. Likewise, they believed they were fulfilling God’s instructions to Jeremiah, “Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt . . . Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will.”²

The clergy were not the only members of American society concerned by the rapid political and cultural changes of the past decade. The Bavarian Illuminati threat and the refashioning of the jeremiad style could not have advanced beyond the fast day exhortations of one man, if his listeners were not equally concerned about the possible ramifications of perceived political divisions and a general decrease in social virtue. Little attention has been paid to why Jedidiah Morse was able successfully, at least for a year’s time, to propagate the existence of the Bavarian Illuminati threat. His own social

¹ Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

² Jeremiah 11: 6-8 from Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 1994), 980.

and political ambitions must be taken into account, but equally important is the climate of uncertainty created in early national New England by the combined influences of civil millennialism and the unionist paradigm.

The unionist paradigm manifested itself that first fateful Fourth of July when after a long and heated debate that very firmly demonstrated the dangers of disunion and discord the Continental Congress finally adopted the Declaration of Independence and established a new nation. According to lore, after affixing his signature to the document, John Hancock stood and warned his fellow delegates, “We must be unanimous. There must be no pulling different ways, we must all hang together.” In response, Benjamin Franklin reportedly quipped, “Yes, we must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately.”³ This notion, of the extreme importance of union for the success of the American republican experiment, has been termed the unionist paradigm by David C. Hendrickson, and it has continued to influence politics to the present day. The last decade of the eighteenth century, the trying ground of American republicanism and a time when no one could be sure of the success of the experiment proved fertile ground for the worst manifestations of political excess and intrigue early national Americans could imagine.

An understanding of the unionist paradigm is essential for any discussion of the political situation of the Early Republic. Hendrickson developed the concept of the

³ John Hancock and Benjamin Franklin, in Jared Sparks, *Works of Benjamin Franklin*, 1 (Boston: Gray, 1840), 408 (apparent source of these quotes).

unionist paradigm as a replacement for the liberal versus classical republicanism debate. The paradigm developed as a response to two fears. Hendrickson explains these competing fears thusly: “at its core were two competing fears- of the anarchy of states and the despotism of consolidated empire- and two mutually independent values: independence and union.”¹¹³ The Federalists were particularly receptive to the fear of international anarchy, while the Anti-Federalists were more susceptible to fears about the development of a consolidated monarchy or universal empire.

The unionist paradigm included a set of ideas and an accompanying debate fueled by these two often-conflicting concerns, but it is important to note that the participants in these debates believed independence and union to be mutually interdependent, one could not exist without the other. As Peter S. Onuf observed, “Federalists and Anti-Federalists used remarkably similar language to describe the inevitable consequences of disunion or consolidation.”¹¹⁴ Likewise, despite any misgivings they harbored toward the final document, the necessity of union led many Federalists and Anti-Federalists to support ratification of the Constitution. James Wilson, best remembered for introducing the three-fifths compromise at the convention, stumped heavily for its adoption despite his private misgivings.

In a speech to the Pennsylvania Ratifying Convention, he described the mood of the American public.

[T]he general sentiment of the citizens of America, is expressed in the motto which some of them have chosen, UNITE OR DIE; and while we consider the extent of the country, so intersected and almost surrounded with navigable rivers,

¹¹³ David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 14.

¹¹⁴ Peter S. Onuf, “Anarchy and the Crisis of Union” in *To Form a More Perfect Union: The Critical Ideas of the Constitution*, Herman Belz, Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 292.

se separated and detached from the rest of the world, it is natural to presume that Providence has designed us for an united people, under one great political compact.¹¹⁵

As Wilson's comments suggest, the Framers were also particularly wary of foreign intervention. In fact, the fear of foreign meddling was so pervasive it all served to unite the framers and coupled with the influence of the unionist paradigm produced a climate conducive to compromise. The ever-present specter of civil war, European intervention and Indian aggression "would all lead Americans to embrace order, even at the expense of their liberties. It hardly mattered if the 'teeth of the lion' were 'again made bare' and the British sought to re-conquer their lost colonies, or if an American 'Caesar or Cromwell' should 'avail himself of our divisions.'"¹¹⁶

Although both Federalists and Anti-Federalists believed in a vital connection between independence and union, they could not agree on a means of preserving either. The issue of sovereignty aptly illustrates this divide. The Federalists, motivated by concerns of international anarchy, advocated a strong central government to deflect this threat. Meanwhile, the Anti-Federalists supported a decentralized government with most of the power held by the states in order to avoid the development of their feared consolidated monarchy. Despite disagreement, the founders managed to reach a series of compromises which attempted to strike a balance between the desires of both parties, but more importantly for our purposes sought to preserve union and therefore, by extension, independence.¹¹⁷ Just as theological factionalism among the clergy weakened Morse's

¹¹⁵ James Wilson, *The Substance of a Speech Delivered by James Wilson, Esq. Explanatory of the general principles of the proposed Federal Constitution* (Philadelphia: Bradford, 1787), 8.

¹¹⁶ Peter S. Onuf, "Anarchy and the Crisis of Union," 286.

¹¹⁷ Jack N. Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 162-180; Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969, 1998), 344-383.

Bavarian Illuminati threat, the lack of any political unity amongst the clergy also opened him to attack.

Certainly, the majority of the Framers firmly believed in the vital importance of maintaining the union. The successful authorship of the Constitution and the fervent appeals for ratification attest that the unionist paradigm represented, and perhaps still does, something much deeper than propaganda or paranoia in American society. The close cooperation of later bitter political rivals, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison, in authoring the Federalist Papers is yet another example. Madison and Hamilton co-authored a discussion of ancient confederacies that serves to illustrate their shared fear of disunion and outside intervention. The authors used the example of the Swiss cantons to illustrate their point; “They have no common treasury; no common troops even in war; no common coin; no common judicatory; nor any other common mark of sovereignty;” instead the cantons were held together by “the peculiarity of their topographical position; by their individual weakness and insignificance; [and] by the fear of powerful neighbors.”¹¹⁸

According to Hamilton and Madison, the Swiss were not ultimately united by their common background and mutual needs. Religion succeeded in separating the Swiss people into Protestant and Catholic, resulting in divided loyalties. Ominously for the American cause, “That separation had another consequence, which merits attention. It produced opposite alliances with foreign powers: of Berne, at the head of the Protestant association, with the United Provinces; and of Luzerne, at the head of the Catholic

¹¹⁸ James Madison with Alexander Hamilton, “Federalist No. 19” in *the Federalist Papers* (Champaign, Illinois: The Gutenberg Project, 1999-?), 118.

association, with France.”¹¹⁹ For the framers the message of history was clear, unite or be divided.

Due to his interest in diplomacy and the international development of the Constitution, Hendrickson’s analysis of the unionist paradigm is limited to the period encompassed by the writing and ratification of the Constitution. However, the influence of the unionist paradigm was not limited to this period and it offers an instructive mode of analysis when applied to the later years of the Adams administration. During these years all the fears inspired by the unionist paradigm seemed to be reaching fruition. The divisions of political parties were becoming readily apparent, foreign countries sought to interfere with the shipping interests of the new country, society seemed less virtuous and less religious than a few short years before. In Massachusetts, the conservative Congregational clergy and the Federalist political leaders faced similar challenges, and one ambitious minister in Charlestown, Massachusetts believed he had stumbled across a means of preserving the social status quo and maintaining the union through an emphasis on virtue. That minister was Jedidiah Morse, and for him the Bavarian Illuminati threat seemed custom-made for the clergy’s need to resuscitate their traditional role in American society.

In the 1790s, the Federalist political leaders and the dominant social and religious leaders in Massachusetts, the Congregational clergy, found themselves in similar positions. Neither group had anticipated the sort of social change the Revolution had precipitated and both feared the potential outcome of these changes. Likewise, Federalist politicians and Congregational clergy recognized a constricting sphere for their social role in their new society. Nathan O. Hatch and James M. Banner agree that ““what drew .

¹¹⁹ Madison with Hamilton, “Federalist No. 19,” 118.

. . [men] to Federalism was a mental association with established authority and an affinity for the fixed and traditional,” but “it is also impossible to dismiss the impact of this reactionary definition of virtue, lodged so close to the heart of New England republican conviction.”¹²⁰ The Federalists and their Congregational allies believed their continued emphasis on virtue separated them from their political and social opponents.

During this period, despite the success of Madison and Jefferson’s campaign for disestablishment in Virginia, New England Federalists maintained the necessity of a close relationship between government and politics, a symbiotic relationship that had existed, firmly entrenched in law, since colonial times. Although civil millennialism had a strong influence before the Revolution, it became a stronger influence on some clergymen in the Revolution’s wake. It is well established among historians that “republican political ideology heightened concern for moral and religious foundations.”¹²¹ A successful republican society must depend on a virtuous people.¹²²

Ironically for the Federalist politicians and Congregational clergy, just as they determined political and religious success depended on the virtue of American citizenry, the populace had begun to embrace differing republican ideals, most visibly through the popularity of evangelical religions and Democratic-Republican societies. This new society did not mirror the virtue the clergy wanted to see in society. Their concern for the fate of society, in both a religious and political sense, as well as their own personal fears, prompted them to search for a solution. This partnership between the Federalists and the orthodox clergy, although never official, inaugurated a campaign among the conservative clergy, with Jedidiah Morse as their defacto leader.

¹²⁰ Hatch, *Sacred Cause*, 137.

¹²¹ Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 213.

¹²² Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 213.

Morse not only had the background and ambition that led him to endorse the Bavarian Illuminati threat, he also had the political connections that provided the evidence to legitimate his cause. For Morse and his allies, the Bavarian Illuminati represented an opportunity to create social change. The existence of a threat to both religion and government could influence the public to mend their ways. What remained was to find a means of informing the republic of the present danger. Unwittingly, President John Adams would provide Morse and his cronies with an opportunity to address their grievances.

No evidence of any contact between Adams and Morse exists from this period, however, in the late 1790s they found themselves in remarkably similar positions. Adams's father had sent him to Harvard to study for the ministry, but his decision to study the law led him instead to become one of the leaders in the American founding era. Instrumental throughout the revolutionary struggle and after for his role in the creation of the Declaration of Independence, the crafting of the Massachusetts State Constitution, and his diplomacy in Europe, by 1798, the outcome of the Revolution was not what Adams had anticipated. He could take little satisfaction in his office of chief executive. His own cabinet consistently undermined him, his own party sought to replace him, diplomacy with France was at a standstill and the opposition press continued to vilify him.

Relations with revolutionary France would prove the most problematic and most criticized aspect of Adam's presidency. Beginning with French naval ships impressing sailors from American merchant vessels, the problem escalated after the XYZ Affair. An infamous incident in American-French relations, the XYZ Affair occurred when French

diplomatic officials, discreetly referred to in the American press as Monsieurs X, Y and Z, demanded an extravagant bribe from the American envoy sent to France by Congress to discuss cessation of impressments. The American diplomats, President Adams, and the American public were outraged by this behavior, and this event inaugurated an undeclared naval war between France and America throughout the Atlantic world. This conflict, combined with the public's demand for retribution and what Americans perceived to be the perversion of revolutionary ideals in the bloodshed and violence of the French Revolution, made difficult Adams's desire to allow diplomacy and a mutual desire for peace soothe relations.¹²³

In typical New England fashion, Adams reacted to the difficulties in his presidency with appeals to God. Although Adams's 1798 and 1799 fast day proclamations met with public opposition, his proclamations were not without precedent. The strongest fast day tradition came from Congregational New England that "had long held an annual governmentally declared fast day on a weekday in the spring."¹²⁴ Echoing perhaps the fast day exhortations of his youth, Adams declared, "The American republic ought to acknowledge its dependence upon Almighty God, especially in dangerous times."¹²⁵ During the Revolution, the Continental Congress proclaimed several through Adams's influence,

On 14 June 1775 the First Continental Congress echoed the familiar New England penitential tone drafted by a committee including John Adams. This proto-national fast day, held on 20 July 1775, set the precedent for confessional fast

¹²³ My discussion of the XYZ Affair is informed by Elkins and McKirtland, *The Age of Federalism*, 549-662.

¹²⁴ Charles Ellis Dickinson, "Jeremiads in the New American Republic: The Case of National Fasts in the John Adams Administration." *New England Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (1987), 189.

¹²⁵ Dickinson "Jeremiads in the New American Republic," 194.

days which Congress continued to declare every spring throughout the Revolutionary War.¹²⁶

Most recently, George Washington had proclaimed two fast days during his administration, the first from a recommendation by Congress and the second in celebration of the successful suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion.

These proclamations received both support and criticism, but importantly neither of the fast days declared by Washington recommended a New-England-style fast. "It took a request by a joint committee of the First Congress to persuade Washington . . . to appoint Thursday, 26 November 1789, a day of national thanksgiving."¹²⁷ The second fast day celebrated the successful ending of the Whiskey Rebellion by his administration on Thursday, 19 November 1795. In direct contrast to Adams's, fast day proclamations, "neither of Washington's religious proclamations appointed a true New England style fast, and the second contained no penitential language at all."¹²⁸

The language of Adams's fast day proclamations clearly states his religious intentions and the concern he shared with the political and social leaders of his home region over the decay of public virtue.

Call to mind our numerous offenses against the Most High God, confess them before him with the sincerest penitence, implore his pardoning mercy, through the Great Mediator and Redeemer, for our past transgressions, and [pray] that through the grace of his Holy Spirit we may be disposed and enabled to yield a more suitable obedience to His righteous requisitions in time to come.¹²⁹

At the same time, Adams also unwittingly provided an opportunity for some factions to widen the pre-existing gulfs between segments of American society. The record shows

¹²⁶ Dickinson, "Jeremiads in the New American Republic," 189.

¹²⁷ Dickinson, "Jeremiads in the New American Republic," 191.

¹²⁸ Dickinson, "Jeremiads in the New American Republic," 191-192.

¹²⁹ James D. Richardson, Ed. *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789-1908*. Vol. 1 1789-1817 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Literature and Art, 1908), 284-286

Alexander Hamilton recommended a national fast in a letter, claiming, "On religious grounds this is very proper- On political, it is very expedient."¹³⁰

Hamilton's later opposition to Adams's bid for re-election and his correspondence with other High Federalist elites give an ominous quality to Hamilton's statement. For the fast day proclamations resulted in severe political implications; as Adams himself stated, "The national fast recommended by me turned me out of office."¹³¹ Later historians remarked, "Whether the jeremiads delivered on the occasion of his two fast days were simply outworn colonial traditions or unacceptable national innovations, they fanned the flames of American political discontent and helped make Adams a one-term president."¹³² Furthermore, Adams's comments regarding the outcome of the 1800 election suggest the changing currents of American popular culture. The majority of the populace viewed fast days and jeremiads as outworn colonial traditions, unacceptable in a republican nation.

Despite the popular opinion, in his fast day proclamations of 1798 and 1799, President John Adams supplied the clergy with a public forum where they could address the dangerous moral decay they felt was rampant in American society. Sermons preached on fast days, election days, thanksgiving days, military occasions or any other event that warranted a special weekday sermon reached a broader audience than the Sunday morning regulars.

The occasions held immense ceremonial importance. Here were unparalleled opportunities to speak to a broad range of men and women in local society, not just church members. Not surprisingly, town and parish ministers whose position

¹³⁰ Dickinson, "Jeremiads in the New American Republic," 192.

¹³¹ John A. Schutz and Douglas Adair, *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805- 1813* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1966) 224.

¹³² Dickinson, "Jeremiads in the New American Republic," 189.

to speak was sanctioned by the state in both theory and practice frequently used weekday sermons to comment on public as well as religious affairs.¹³³

In the 1790s, when Congregational Church membership diminished rapidly and women comprised the bulk of church members, Congregational clergy turned to the fast day sermon to reach a larger segment of society.

The content of fast day sermons differed from the weekly Sunday sermon. On Sundays the clergy functioned as guides to personal salvation for their congregations. Alternatively, “on weekdays- as the occasion required- they would become social guardians telling the nation who they were and what they must do to retain God’s special covenant interest.”¹³⁴ The fast day sermon generally followed the format of the jeremiad; it was an opportunity for the clergy to address the shortcomings of the population in front of a large audience. “The primary occasion for publicly recognizing these times of trouble was the fast day- the time when ministers integrated the theory of federal covenants into the public life of their particular communities. The fast sermon, however, could be finely tuned to particular local sins and applied with a chilling directness to the specific calamities that occasioned the fast.”¹³⁵ This perhaps explains Morse’s tendency to make his most impassioned claims about the fate of the American republic in sermons delivered on special occasions.

After allowing his announcement of the Bavarian Illuminati threat to percolate through the fall and summer months, Jedidiah Morse again addressed the themes of virtue and republicanism in November, 1798. In Morse’s mind, the two were intimately linked, and while his 1798 Thanksgiving sermon addressed the danger posed by the Illuminati,

¹³³ Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 172.

¹³⁴ Stout, *The New England Soul*, 27.

¹³⁵ Stout, *The New England Soul*, 74.

he devoted much of his oration to the importance of public virtue. From his pulpit, Morse chided his congregation for their immoral behavior. “Party zeal and animosities have, in some instances, marred our happiness. Prejudices have too often blinded the eyes of the mind against the perception of truth.”¹³⁶

True to his desired role as a moral compass for his community, Morse imparted advice that was the culmination of two decades hard work by the Congregational ministry. The connection between virtue and republican government Morse voiced that November morning was the offspring of Congregational Revolutionary rhetoric.

Christianity sheds a most benign and salutary influence on society. It teacheth us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. It prohibits the indulgence of those appetites and desires *only*, which cannot be satisfied without impairing the happiness of others. It is highly friendly to genuine liberty.¹³⁷

Throughout the clerical campaign of 1798 and 1799, conservative clergy in southern New England reacted to the incorporation of millennial thought and republican ideology into New England society, the careful creation of two decades and of tremendous social upheaval.

The 1798 thanksgiving sermon did not stress the Illuminati threat as much as the fast day sermons. This could be for several reasons, including a different audience or a different atmosphere for the occasion. However, Morse still informed his congregation of a very grave threat, suggesting that if American citizens did not change their behavior the future of the government was in question. In presenting a solution Morse, first decried the lack of laws against such behavior. “Many of our laws, indeed, against vice and immorality, those particularly against profane swearing, debauchery, gaming, and

¹³⁶ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29, 1798*, 9.

¹³⁷ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29, 1798*, 25.

Sabbath-breaking, are but a dead letter.”¹³⁸ Clearly, Morse believed the government had neglected its moral duties. Consequently, Morse adopted an approach akin to popular sovereignty. To a certain extent the people must police themselves.

Recalling the earlier covenanted community, Morse advised, “No community can attain the ends of society, which are peace, security, and happiness, unless government be respected and obeyed.”¹³⁹ Morse held the people responsible to the concept of popular sovereignty as he interpreted it. As voters they must elect wise, pious and virtuous leaders and, because they chose these leaders, they must obey and respect them. Morse believed that somewhere along the path to American independence, someone had neglected to inform the American people they could not mount an insurrection in response to every unjust action. This was the wrong interpretation of republicanism, and if, it continued, Morse feared constant societal unrest and the disruption of the union. Therefore, in every one of his published sermons Morse stressed respect for and obedience towards society’s civil and religious leaders.

Biblical comparisons were common in the religious and political rhetoric of the early republic. Morse and many others perceived a strong connection between the present American situation and the Biblical book of Isaiah.

How far the facts and circumstances, in the foregoing narrative, apply to our case as a nation; what degrees of resemblance there are in the causes which involved good Hezekiah and his people in their great perplexity and distress, and those which have brought us into our present unhappy and perilous situation, I leave everyone to judge for himself.¹⁴⁰

Biblical comparisons proved a useful rhetorical tool for religious leaders in early America because the majority of Americans were well acquainted with the Bible. Therefore, the

¹³⁸ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29th, 1798*, 12.

¹³⁹ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29th, 1798*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered . . . May 9th, 1798*, 11.

majority of listeners found comparisons between a present event, person or country and a Biblical theme, event or character readily comprehensible. Moreover, this ready comprehension made tedious explanation unnecessary. If a speaker compared the current actions of the French nation to the actions of the Assyrian nation, his listeners readily recognized Assyria and by extension France as “a treacherous and faithless, as well as powerful nation.”¹⁴¹

In the hands of a speaker accustomed to integrating religious and political imagery, such as Morse, Jefferson became the weak and wicked Ahaz and Adams the pious and wise Hezekiah. The message was blunt; any person familiar with Isaiah would oppose the election of a presidential candidate with many similarities to the Biblical King Ahaz. As Abiel Holmes so appropriately questioned in 1799, “Who does not perceive a happy resemblance between the conduct of the Jewish King, and of the AMERICAN PRESIDENT?”¹⁴²

Morse expressed particular concern about the leadership abilities of an irreligious leader. He asked his congregation, “Can *he* be a friend to his fellow creatures who hates Christianity, who opposes its progress, who seeks its subversion, ridicules its ordinances, and vilifies its teachers?”¹⁴³ There was no need for Morse to name the man he spoke of, every citizen of Massachusetts and Connecticut was well aware that the conservative clergy opposed the election of Jefferson, widely suspected of holding deist beliefs, a position the clergy equated with atheism. If Jefferson was portrayed as the wicked Ahaz, Adams was clearly the good King Hezekiah, “whose moral, religious, and political

¹⁴¹ Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered . . . May 9th, 1798*, 6.

¹⁴² Holmes, *A Sermon Preached at Brattle Street Church*, 19.

¹⁴³ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29th, 1798*, 27.

character are well known.”¹⁴⁴ There were no secrets with Adams, a pious son of New England, his Unitarian leanings conveniently forgotten. Only Adams reliably navigated the ship of state. Morse believed Adams had already proven his worth.

For myself, I cannot forbear observing, that I consider it as one of the most prominent evidences of the Divine Goodness to our country, that the ‘life and usefulness’ of this great and good man have been preserved . . . That bold and decisive policy which he has adopted and pursued, and in which, happily, he has been supported by Congress and the People, has, I verily believe, been the means of saving our Constitution.¹⁴⁵

High praise indeed, but even the illustrious Adams could not ensure the survival of American republicanism alone. In that crusade, he had a great ally in the orthodox, Old Calvinist branch of the Congregational clergy. In his next sermon, Morse would fully discuss the importance of the clerical role.

In May 1799, one month prior to his second fast day sermon discussing the Illuminati, Morse traveled to Philadelphia. While there he met with Secretary of the Treasury Oliver Wolcott Jr. and Secretary of State Timothy Pickering. Morse later wrote that during this meeting the three men discussed the current political situation and Morse’s efforts in New England. Soon after his return to Charlestown, Morse received, probably from Wolcott, Abbé Augustin Barruel’s inflammatory memoirs entitled *Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*.

The book included the same material as Robison’s earlier account but “made the conspiracy even more extensive, tracing its origins to the early eighteenth century with the work of Voltaire and D’Alembert.”¹⁴⁶ The panicked tone and wide scope of Barruel’s book may explain the increased paranoia present in Morse’s 1799 fast day sermon.

¹⁴⁴ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29th, 1798*, 19.

¹⁴⁵ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29th, 1798*, 19.

¹⁴⁶ Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 84.

Shortly after reading Barruel's *Memoirs*, Morse wrote to Wolcott claiming, "that the *Jacobins*, like their father, the first *Disorganizer*, can transform themselves into any shape, even into that of an angel of light, in order to accomplish their purposes, prejudices, vices- in a word, all that is wrong in human nature, against all good."¹⁴⁷

Supplying Morse with information proved a successful strategy for Wolcott. The Federalist Party benefited from his claims of conspiracy, very quickly leading Federalist newspapers in Philadelphia and New York to reprint extracts of the sermons. "Within Massachusetts, Federalist leaders had four hundred copies distributed to the state's clergy by members of the legislature on their return from the winter session in Boston."¹⁴⁸

His involvement with the upper echelons of Federalist leadership increased Morse's sense of the danger currently faced by American society, government and religion. However, there is no evidence that Federalist elites allowed Morse inside the political circle he so coveted. Nor is there evidence that Morse was a party lackey. He first discovered the Illuminati narrative independently of any Federalist influence and his language suggests that he genuinely believed in the dangerous aspects of the conspiracy he peddled. Morse's intentions aside, clearly his sermons were carefully created to further the Federalist and the Congregational cause.

In April 1799, Morse seemed particularly concerned with anticlericalism. The Bavarian Illuminati figured prominently in this sermon, including the claim of a McCarthy-esque list of suspected members of the Illuminati in Virginia. His meeting with Wolcott and his reading of Barruel's book most likely caused the increased paranoid style of this last sermon by Morse addressing the Bavarian Illuminati. Morse proclaimed

¹⁴⁷ Jedidiah Morse quoted in Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 84.

¹⁴⁸ Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 81.

the true reason for American anticlericalism was the influence of French anticlericalism. “No, my brethren, the true ground of opposition to the clergy of America, at the present time is, they are decidedly opposed to the *hostile designs and insidious aim of the French Government*.”¹⁴⁹

At this point Morse may have felt somewhat alone in opposing the French threat. Adams refused to declare war on France and liberal Congregationalists in New England were busily attempting to refute the Bavarian Illuminati conspiracy. Allowing himself to become caught up in his own paranoid ranting, Morse made the astounding announcement,

I have now in my possession complete and indubitable proof that such societies do exist, and have for many years existed, in the United States: I have, my brethren, an official, authenticated list of the names, ages, places of nativity, professions, &c. of the officers and members of a Society of *Illuminati*, (or as they are now more generally and properly styled, *Illuminees*) consisting of *one hundred* members, instituted in Virginia, by the *Grand Orient* of France.¹⁵⁰

Unlike Joseph McCarthy one hundred and fifty years later, Morse actually did possess proof, published a few weeks later with the fast sermon as part of an extensive appendix. Furthermore, Morse claimed that another Illuminati society, possibly older and more extensive, existed in New York.

Perhaps as a reaction to the increasingly criticism directed toward him and the Illuminati in local papers, Morse published his April 1799 sermon with an extensive appendix where he diligently provided his sources for his allegations. Located at the front of the appendix were four pages of names, most of them French in origin, Morse’s boasted list. The list is extremely detailed, providing age, occupation and place of birth for each entry. However, the origins of the list is impossible to trace. The seal on the final

¹⁴⁹ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29th, 1798*, 21.

¹⁵⁰ Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25th, 1799*, 15-16.

page, however, featuring a compass, two pillars and a skull suggests a Masonic connection, rather than the presence of the Bavarian Illuminati.¹⁵¹

The detailed information concerning the alleged Illuminati members in Virginia and New York is evidence of Morse's connection to Federalists leaders. Morse boasted an extensive correspondence, but he did not have the connections to gather such a detailed list. During the 1790s, Morse communicated with several members of the Federalist Party leadership, most notably Oliver Wolcott Jr. and diplomat John Jay. In the April 1799 fast day sermon, one central fact may have reached Morse's ears through Federalist channels. Although Morse accused the French of many heinous crimes, French actions against American shipping was one of the few for which there was substantial proof. In this sermon, Morse used the actions of the French navy to illustrate the threat posed by the French nation,

Recent intelligence from the West Indies, which has obtained general credit is, that on of our merchant ships has been taken by several French privateers, and the prisoners, (five or six excepted) consisting of 70 souls, all immediately put to the sword, by the blood thirsty victors.¹⁵²

Despite the story featuring prominently in the news for several weeks, Morse desired more information. In a letter written to Oliver Wolcott on June 11, 1799, he included a postscript requesting further news. "Pray, sir, can you trace the origin of the report of the massacre of the crew of the Ocean? Was any other ship's treated in that same inhuman manner? If so, I will thank you to communicate to me the intelligence as soon as you can."¹⁵³ This correspondence suggests that Wolcott and Morse shared

¹⁵¹ Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25th, 1799*, 41-45.

¹⁵² Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25th, 1799*, 13.

¹⁵³ George Gibbs, *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams, Edited from the Papers of Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury*, (New York: William Van Norden, 1846), 242.

growing concerns over the increasing social and political uncertainty within the United States.

With the same letter, Morse included several copies of the Convention of Massachusetts Congregational Clergy's 1799 address for Wolcott to distribute among the Philadelphia clergy. Morse also assured Wolcott, "You will see by these things that the clergy are not asleep this way. They ought everywhere, indeed, to be awake."¹⁵⁴ Within the pages of Morse's correspondence with Federalists leaders the growing concern each group felt is clearly evident. Both the Congregational clergy in New England and the Federalists throughout the nation felt threatened by recent events. In a January 30, 1799 letter to Morse, John Jay expressed the distress felt by many political and social conservatives.

We see many things, my dear sir, which might be altered for the better, and that, I believe, has been the case at all times. But at this period, there certainly are an uncommon number and series of events and circumstances which assume an aspect unusually portentous.¹⁵⁵

No one involved with the new republican government doubted the significance of the present moment. For a generation of men preoccupied with their place in history it was clear that the development of the United States would reflect upon their memory. Both the Federalists and the Congregational clergy witnessed the demise of their republican utopia. A republic based upon order, leadership by the elite, educated few and a strong, symbiotic relationship between government and religion.

Like other leaders who have found their power challenged and their status weakened, the conservative forces in early America searched for a means of reversing

¹⁵⁴ Gibbs, *Memoirs of the Administrations*, 241.

¹⁵⁵ John Jay, *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay, 1763-1826*, Henry P. Johnston, ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 252.

current trends. The New England Federalists and conservative Congregational clergy, made allies by uncertain times and similar goals, identified two dangers to the American republican experiment and the very existence of the union itself. The first, continuing a theme from the colonial past, was the French nation. In a letter to Oliver Wolcott, Morse described the danger posed by the revolutionary French government. While armed conflict with France could be disastrous, Morse confessed himself, “infinitely more afraid of their *principles* than their arms.”¹⁵⁶ Many High Federalists advocated war with France during the late 1790s; this constituted a break with Adams’s peaceful diplomatic overtures to the French government in the wake of well-documented impressments of American sailors and the embarrassment of the XYZ Affair.

This divisions in the Federalist leadership weakened the prospects of Federalist candidates in the upcoming election. His relationship with Jay and Wolcott and his New England heritage placed Morse in a difficult position. He desperately desired acceptance from the Federalist elites he tried to emulate through his prolific geographies and pulpit politics. However, Morse was also a son of New England; he felt a strong connection to Adams and seems to have genuinely admired the President. He offered unwavering support to Adams throughout the political turmoil of 1799 and 1800, and although he frequently denounced the French nation in sermons, he never advocated war with France. Although the recent actions of the French presented an opportune target, the French provided an imperfect target.

The second danger, irreligion, proved significantly more amenable to New England society and the present political predicament. John Jay’s 1799 letter to Jedidiah Morse reflects a continued concern amongst conservatives about the increase in

¹⁵⁶ Gibbs, *Memoirs of the Administrations*, 241.

irreligion. Jay wrote, “Infidelity has become a political engine, alarming both by the force and the extent of its operations.”¹⁵⁷ The Federalists and the Congregationalists believed themselves to be the true champions of American republicanism, but could not deny that the republicanism espoused by the Democratic-Republicans, and the evangelicals appealed more to the average American citizen. Therefore, the rise of evangelicalism and democratic sentiments threatened the religious and the political elites.

When Jedidiah Morse climbed into his pulpit in 1799, he declared to his expectant audience, “It has long been suspected that *secret societies*, under the influence and direction of France, holding principles subversive of our religion and government, existed in this country.”¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, by emphasizing concerns held by both the political and religious leaders in New England, he provided the conservative elements of American politics and religion with an immensely effective explanation. The Bavarian Illuminati combined the threats presented by the French and the growing evangelical faiths into one and fashioned an enemy New Englanders in particular could identify as the ultimate enemy, the ever-present Anti-Christ of civil millennial discourse.

Although Morse’s main source of anxiety remained the condition of New England society and the preservation of Congregationalism, he harnessed the Illuminati threat for political means. The choice of states harboring Illuminati societies were no coincidence. Virginia, of course, was the home state of Thomas Jefferson and New York the home state of Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton had recently become an enemy of Adams and his loyal supporters by authoring a villainous letter that relentlessly criticized Adams. Even more suspect were “the not-so-covert efforts of the Hamiltonians to slip Charles

¹⁵⁷ Jay, *The Correspondence and Public Papers*, 252.

¹⁵⁸ Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25th, 1799*, 15.

Cotesworth Pinckney in ahead” of Adams in the 1800 presidential election.¹⁵⁹ By implying a strong Illuminati presence in each of these states, Morse further suggested that they might also have a role in the politics of that state, especially since many charged the Illuminati with endeavoring “to destroy the confidence of the people in the constituted authorities and divide them from government.”¹⁶⁰

The conservative clergy in southern New England predicted dire consequences for the American republic if Thomas Jefferson won the presidential election in 1800. Many religiously conservative men throughout the Northeast felt similarly. John Mitchell Mason, a Presbyterian minister in New York, expressed his concern toward the coming election, “I dread the election of Mr. Jefferson, because I believe him to be a confirmed infidel: you desire it, because, while he is politically acceptable, you either doubt this fact, or do not consider it essential.”¹⁶¹ The calm, collected, logical outline of Jefferson’s infidelity, written by Mason in 1800, used Jefferson’s published work, *Notes on the state of Virginia*, to demonstrate the potential president’s irrefutable infidelity. However, the primary spokesmen for the orthodox, Old Calvinist Congregationalist faction in Massachusetts and Connecticut, Jedidiah Morse and Timothy Dwight, did not rely upon such rational arguments.

Morse’s Illuminati sermons of 1798 and 1799 made clear that only true Christianity could preserve the American republic, and only the respect and obedience of the people toward proper elected leaders and the clergy could ensure the creation of a Christian republic. Morse’s message became part of a larger clerical campaign when

¹⁵⁹ Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 692.

¹⁶⁰ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29th, 1798*, 13.

¹⁶¹ John Mitchell Mason, “The Voice of Warning to Christians,” (1800) in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 1453.

ministerial colleagues picked up similar themes. Timothy Dwight continued the Illuminati discourse in a sermon given on the Fourth of July, 1798, several weeks after Morse's original sermon. Dwight echoed similar allegations against the Illuminati. Undeniably a superior orator and writer with a strong background in poetry, Dwight declared, "In the societies of Illuminati doctrines were taught, which strike at the root of human happiness and virtue; and every such doctrine was either expressly or implicitly involved in their system."¹⁶²

In explaining the proper defense against the Illuminati, Dwight used the same method as Morse. Dwight told his listeners,

You already know what is to be done, and the manner in which it is to be done . . . But it may be necessary to remind you, that personal obedience and reformation is the foundation, and the sum, of all national worth and prosperity. If each man conducts himself aright, the community cannot be conducted wrong. If the private life be unblamable, the public state must be commendable and happy.¹⁶³

If personal obedience and reformation were the foundation of a prosperous and happy republic, the clergy were irreplaceable. Dwight wrote, "Christianity cannot fall, but by the neglect of the Sabbath," and it was the clergy that reminded the people to partake in weekly worship and facilitated the worship of God.¹⁶⁴ Like Morse, Dwight believed a proper Christian society could not exist without the clergy.

On April 25, 1799, the Bavarian Illuminati's clerical opposition experienced a surge in popularity. Likewise, Morse's refashioned jeremiad message, a prophecy of the destruction of government and religion if the population did not regain its virtue, also reached a wider audience. Many of the clerical members of the orthodox, Old Calvinist

¹⁶² Timothy Dwight, "The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis," (1798) in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 1374.

¹⁶³ Dwight, "The Duty of Americans," 1378.

¹⁶⁴ Dwight, "The Duty of Americans," 1380.

Congregational faction referred to the conspiracy in their fast day sermons. Some contained veiled references, while others were far more explicit. Ezra Weld assured his Braintree congregation of his personal perusal of the appendix to Morse's thanksgiving sermon and assured them "you will find, I am most confident, abundant reason to alter your opinions relative to France, and the doings of our American government."¹⁶⁵

Echoing the opinions of Morse and Dwight, Weld adopted the refashioned jeremiad as he reminded his listeners and readers of the duties of all citizens of a civilized state, "a Constitution, however, which was not only formed by wisdom and prudence, but needs the same for the pillars of its support. It rests upon the shoulders of the people, upon, their cheerful submission to their own laws, and resistance of all foreign influence."¹⁶⁶

While ministers like Weld, Osgood and Holmes decided not to directly address the troubling claims of the Illuminati's growing power Weld preached that they did emphasize the great importance of public virtue.

The *neglecters* of the public worship of God; the *Sabbath-breakers*, and *gamblers* of the present period; the *profane*, &c. . . . cannot find themselves willing to carry their obedience on to universal submission to the laws of the community. Such licentiousness is indicative of our public unhappiness; for where the laws of a community or State are menaced and violated with boldness and perseverance, and the symptoms of dissolution are visible.¹⁶⁷

By connecting the success of the republic and public virtue in their fast day sermons, the clergy chose to accentuate their interpretation of republicanism tempered by millennial discourse.

The orthodox fast day sermons in April 1799 especially warned of the threat posed by "the disorganizers of civil government" who were the "real enemies to all

¹⁶⁵ Weld, *A Discourse, Delivered April 25, 1799*, vi.

¹⁶⁶ Weld, *A Discourse, Delivered April 25, 1799*, 12.

¹⁶⁷ Weld, *A Discourse, Delivered April 25, 1799*, 22.

denominations of the *religious*.”¹⁶⁸ Morse’s ministerial colleagues quickly recognized the power of a threat to both government and religion, this dual threat coupled with the millennial expectations held by New Englanders provided incentive for their listeners to adopt their advice. David Osgood referred to anti-Christian elements and Abiel Holmes quoted John Adams’s fast day proclamation, a document that reiterated the alarmist language used by Morse. “The most precious interests of the people of the United States are still held in jeopardy- by the dissemination among them of those principles subversive of the foundations of all religious, moral and social obligations, that have produced incalculable mischief and misery in other countries.”¹⁶⁹

These men agreed with Morse and Dwight. Holmes reminded his congregation of the Book of Isaiah and the familiar story of King Hezekiah,

The King of Assyria was a rod in God’s hand for the correction of his covenant people. What the Assyrian was to *them*, the Terrible Republic may be to *us* . . . The great condition of our security is nothing less than national religion: *The Lord is with you while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.*¹⁷⁰

The conservative ministers hoped to remind their flocks of their kinship to the Israelites. They too were covenanted people. If they desired a thriving and content republic, they must carry out their part of the bargain as the clergy interpreted it.

The conservative clergy championed republicanism, yet differed greatly from the evangelicals or the Democratic-Republicans. The clergy espoused a form of limited liberty. Their experiences with civil millennialism and their understanding of virtue taught them that only religion could motivate people to seek the common good, and they

¹⁶⁸ Weld, *A Discourse, Delivered April 25, 1799*, 29.

¹⁶⁹ Holmes, *A Sermon Preached at the Brattle Street Church*, 28.

¹⁷⁰ Holmes, *A Sermon Preached at the Brattle Street Church*, 27.

believed the creation of a moral society was essential to successful republicanism.

Furthermore, only a virtuous citizenry could maintain the bonds of union.

The clergy believed an irreligious populace would doom the republican experiment as assuredly as foreign intervention. Therefore, the clergy fought to preserve order in society in order to maintain their definition of liberty. Morse desired that “liberty be given the opportunity to flourish *within* the governmental system.”¹⁷¹ Morse had personal reasons to maintain the status quo, but he was keenly aware “that liberty could only operate within certain limitations.”¹⁷² In the minds of Morse, Dwight and their ministerial colleagues, traditional religion and a strong social role for the clergy were the only means of preserving American republicanism. Certain that disrespect for the law would result in increased government or the dissolution of government, neither acceptable outcomes, the clergy prepared a campaign to preserve American liberty.

Historian Richard J. Moss believed Morse had aims beyond the conspiracy. “He did not argue that recent events were understandable solely as the product of a diabolical plot; he sought to put these events in a much larger context.”¹⁷³ The Illuminati narrative in the hands of the orthodox Old Calvinists was not a tool for spreading fear and panic. Quite the opposite, their arguments “imposed a degree of rationality onto a series of events that otherwise challenged existing categories of thought.”¹⁷⁴ The Illuminati threat uniquely suited the campaign waged by the conservative clergy; a threat to both government and religion demonstrated their belief in the essential nature of a connection

¹⁷¹ Alan K. Snyder, “Foundations of Liberty: The Christian Republicanism of Timothy Dwight and Jedidiah Morse,” *The New England Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (1983), 389.

¹⁷² Snyder, “Foundations of Liberty,” 389.

¹⁷³ Moss, “Jedidiah Morse and the Illuminati Affair,” 142.

¹⁷⁴ Wells, *The Devil and Doctor Dwight*, 153.

between church and state. Furthermore, the internal threat required citizens' diligence, and renewed public virtue.

The conservative elements of New England Congregational clergy, with their world outlook tinged with civil millennialism and the unionist paradigm, concern over public virtue, and status anxiety, were predisposed to accept the existence of an Illuminati threat. However, New England citizens were also inclined to believe conspiracy threats because of their ideological and religious backgrounds. In his study of republican religion during the early national period, historian William Gribbin explained the ready acceptance of paranoid style rhetoric in New England.

This was one reason why the attitudes which social scientists call the 'paranoid style' flourished among them, for the republican ideology presumed that the continuance of liberty was possible only when the moral fiber of the nation was strong. Hence, any decline from virtue was a political matter; and the toleration of sinful conduct, even private vices causing no immediate disruption to the body politic, endangered the state.¹⁷⁵

New Englanders were steeped in the theology of millennial hope, the covenanted community and the cooperation between church and state for generations. Therefore, unlike citizens in Virginia or even nearby New York, the propaganda presented by the clergy meshed with their political and religious expectations.

Although Moss criticizes Jedidiah Morse's Bavarian Illuminati sermons as "poorly written and organized," in actuality they were finely crafted Federalist propaganda.¹⁷⁶ A firm believer in Federalist policy, Morse relished the praise his fast day sermons received from the Federalist leadership, because "if he could not shape policy,

¹⁷⁵ Gribbin, William. "Republican Religion and the American Churches in the Early National Period." *The Historian* 35, no. 1 (1972), 62.

¹⁷⁶ Moss, "Jedidiah Morse and the Illuminati Affair," 153.

[he] at least wanted to influence public opinion.”¹⁷⁷ The Federal leadership may have recognized this desire in Morse; evidence suggests that Oliver Wolcott supplied Morse with information pertaining to the existence of Illuminati cells on American soil.

In times of crisis, individuals often return to the old, the comfortable, and the traditional. Like the clergy, New Englanders with their firm background in Calvinism and New England political thought were preprogrammed to accept the validity of the Bavarian Illuminati threat. Morse thoroughly utilized past experiences in his efforts to demonstrate the danger posed by the Illuminati. In his sermons, Morse often invoked the memory of past generations,

Our pious ancestors saw the hand of God in every thing, more especially in all signal events, such as pestilence, famine, earthquakes, war, and other calamities. But it had become fashionable as of late, to ascribe these feelings to the uncontrolled operations of natural causes, and to keep out of view the Divine agency.¹⁷⁸

The conservative clergy called upon New England citizens to follow their ancestors and watch for the hand of God in everyday events. The Bavarian Illuminati posed a grave threat to New England culture. To combat it Morse recommended,

To prevent this as far as in us lies, it behooves us to listen to the voice of providence in the present events, which loudly warns us that loudly warns us to avoid all political connection with those nations which seem devoted to destruction; to watch the movements, and detect and expose the machinations of their numerous emissaries among us; to reject, as we would the most deadly poison, their atheistical and destructive principles in whatever way or shape they may be insinuated among us, to take heed that we partake not of their sins, that we may not receive her plagues.¹⁷⁹

The threat from the Bavarian Illuminati worked perfectly under these conditions; had the clergy attempted to persuade their parishioners to thwart the Illuminati threat in an

¹⁷⁷ Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 81.

¹⁷⁸ Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25th, 1799*, 28.

¹⁷⁹ Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25th, 1799*, 31.

unconventional manner, their campaign would have failed outright. The strength of the clerical campaign lay in the clergy's proposed solution, a return to traditional religious values and a more stable government structure. This echoed the concerns of influential local Federalists and fit neatly in the New England traditional of holding the French in suspicion.

The clerical concern over social morality is well established, as is the fact that most of the clergy considered vice and irreligion to be on the rise in early national America. Jedidiah Morse defined irreligion as "a contempt of all religion and moral obligation, impiety, and everything that opposes itself to pure Christianity."¹⁸⁰ Drawing upon the lesson provided by the Greek and Roman downfalls, Morse reminded his congregation that only "through the goodness of God, we continue to enjoy Constitutions of Civil Government well calculated to secure and maintain our rights, civil and religious."¹⁸¹ Morse believed that freedom was a privilege, not a right and that the success of American government depended upon God's goodwill. Like other clerical members of the orthodox, Old Calvinist faction, Morse feared the goodwill of God was diminishing because of the rampant spread of immorality, greed and vice. Morse cautioned,

Vice is hostile to freedom. A wicked people cannot long remain a free people. If, as a nation, we progress in impiety, demoralization, and licentiousness, for twenty years to come, as rapidly as we have for twenty years past, this circumstance alone will be sufficient, without the aid of any other cause, to subvert our present form of government.¹⁸²

The clergy felt immense concern about their society because their experiences with civil millennialism and Revolutionary republican rhetoric coupled with the influence of the

¹⁸⁰ Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered . . . May 9th, 1798*, 17.

¹⁸¹ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29th, 1798*, 10.

¹⁸² Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29th, 1798*, 12.

unionist paradigm convinced them that the success of their country depended on the virtue of their fellow citizens. Furthermore, because colonial and Revolutionary New England culture emphasized the social watchmen role of the clergy, these men believed it was their duty to protect and guide society. Thus, the conservative clergy believed they were fulfilling their traditional role when they created the Bavarian Illuminati controversy. It is therefore unsurprising they would use the traditional rhetorical device of their predecessors, used through a history of crises to protect and guide New Englanders, the New England jeremiad.

CHAPTER III

WATCHMEN OF THE NEW JERUSALEM: JEDIDIAH MORSE, THE BAVARIAN ILLUMINATI AND THE REBIRTH OF THE JEREMIAD

In each of his sermons addressing the Bavarian Illuminati, Morse warned of the dangers to “political and religious welfare” with “all the frankness and plainness becoming an honest and faithful watchman.”¹⁸³ Morse was by no means the first New England clergyman to announce a threat to the New England Way or the burgeoning American Republic. Just as he echoed the message of his ancestors, he also used their rhetorical device, the jeremiad.

The term jeremiad usually conjures images of puritan New England; however, the tradition originated in the medieval European pulpit. The puritans transported the jeremiad to New England, where it developed its distinctive characteristics. Sacvan Bercovitch depicted the American jeremiad as “a ritual designed to join social criticism to spiritual renewal, public to private identity, the shifting ‘signs of the times’ to certain traditional metaphors, themes and symbols.”¹⁸⁴ The jeremiad included the prophecy of a coming catastrophic punishment directly from the hands of an angry God for a collective sin of which all members of society are guilty. Although usually equated with hellfire and brimstone, the jeremiad extends the possibility of forgiveness, if the listeners follow the

¹⁸³ Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25th*, 1799, 9.

¹⁸⁴ Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, xi.

advice of the speaker the society can return to a social order similar, if not superior, to the old days, which are usually considered spiritually superior to the present.¹⁸⁵

The primary purpose of the colonial jeremiad was to reinvigorate religious practice and revive the covenant between God and the New England people. In a bold departure from Perry Miller's traditional analysis of the puritan jeremiad as pessimistic declarations of impending doom, Bercovitch argued that "the Puritans' cries of declension and doom were part of a strategy designed to revitalize the errand."¹⁸⁶ The early residents of Massachusetts Bay Colony were participants in no less than three covenants, religious, political and social. The puritans strongly identified with the biblical stories of the Israelites because they believed they too were God's chosen people and had been led to America in order to establish a New Jerusalem.

The religious covenant was central to the founding of Massachusetts as a New Jerusalem and permeated nearly all aspects of the society. As the percentage of founding generation members continued to decline, the second-generation clergy increasingly perceived social and religious disintegration. Other factors increased the social decline witnessed by the clergy. Economic, population and settlement growth were all concerns, mainly because they threatened the established social dynamics of the colony and, most ominously for the clergy, the traditional social power of the clergy and the exacting maintenance of religious observation.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Stout, *The New England Soul*; Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*; Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*; Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, 6.

¹⁸⁶ Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, xiv.

¹⁸⁷ My understanding of the jeremiad, its development and use has been informed by the work of Stout, *The New England Soul*; Heimert, *Religion and the New England Mind*; Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*.

As discussed previously in chapter one, the Half-Way covenant increased the number of colony residents eligible for baptism and generated a bitter debate between supporters and opponents. The supporters included the overwhelming majority of ministers and the colony magistrates led by Richard Mather, Thomas Cobbett, John Norton and other established clerical leaders, while a few maverick ministers and the lay members of the various congregations under the leadership of Mather's sons, Eleazer and Increase, composed the opposition. Increase Mather and other opponents put their arguments against the Half-Way covenant into print, and, while discussion has centered on Mather's rebellion from his father and his desire to increase his own popularity by joining the opposition, the proof of a rift between the clergy over the issue is much more significant for this discussion. For "the very existence of published clerical dissent undermined the cultural domination of the clergy by suggesting there was more than one way to legitimately interpret the scriptures."¹⁸⁸

The debate weakened the homogeneity of the New England Way. The efforts by clergy on both sides of the debate to undermine their opponents encouraged lay church members to openly oppose their ministers. Occasionally, "the inability of pew and pulpit to agree led to schism and the establishment of competing churches."¹⁸⁹ The colonial clergy found their authority diminished by the Half-Way Covenant debate and sought a means to preserve their social role. Like their successors over a century later, the clergy of 1660's Massachusetts were undergoing "a classic case of status anxiety," the cause of which was largely of their own making.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Staloff, *The Making of an American Thinking Class*, 149.

¹⁸⁹ Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 164.

¹⁹⁰ Hatch, *Sacred Cause*, 102.

As their social status eroded, the clergy turned to prophesy to legitimize their role as social watchmen. Perhaps most prominent among the second generation minister-prophets was Increase Mather, who predicted New England's "day of trouble is near" in a December 11, 1663 fast-day sermon. Mather reminded his congregation of their role as a covenanted people and that God had heaped great punishment upon the heads of un-virtuous past covenanted peoples. Mather warned his listeners of a coming judgment, the direct cause of which was God. "He is the cause of all evils of punishment: there is no evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it; he createth darkness."¹⁹¹ Mather discussed the catalog of sins generally included in the colonial jeremiad, such as greed, pride and irreligion. The most important for Mather was the growing disrespect afforded the clergy.¹⁹²

In Mather's interpretation, all the clergy joined him in predicting a rapidly approaching day of trouble, "That if the Lord's watchmen do with one voice cry, *the day of trouble is near* . . . it is [true] indeed. Men may slight this *sign*, as the *Edomites* did, but believe it."¹⁹³ According to Mather, the clergy had been repeating a refrain of warning for some time, but to no avail. The people, distracted by worldly pursuits, had forsaken the covenant and generally ignored the clergy.

O say they, you have been preaching to us these several years, that there is a night coming upon us, but we see no such thing. *The watchmen said, the morning*

¹⁹¹ Increase Mather, *The day of trouble is near*. [electronic resource] : Two sermons wherein is shewed, what are the signs of a day of trouble being near. And particularly, what reason there is for New-England to expect a day of trouble. Also what is to be done, that we may escape these things which shall come to pass. Preached (the 11th day of the 12th month, 1673. Being a day of humiliation in one of the churches in Boston. / By Increase Mather, teacher of that church. (Cambridge: Marmaduke Johnson, 1674), 1.

¹⁹² Michael G. Hall, *The Last American Puritan: The Life of Increase Mather, 1639-1723* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988); Staloff, *The Making of an American Thinking Class*.

¹⁹³ Mather, *The Day of Trouble is Near*, 14.

cometh, and also the night: Albeit at present you have a morning, you are in a prosperous state, yet a night of misery is nearer to you, then you are aware of.¹⁹⁴

Fortunately, for Mather and his reputation, New England events over the following years seemed to bring the punishment he had predicted. Less than eighteen months after his December 1673 sermon, the violence of King Philip's War erupted on the colonial frontier seemingly confirming Mather's prophetic powers.¹⁹⁵

For Mather and his clergy brethren, "crisis had become their source of strength."¹⁹⁶ Mather compared himself and his clerical colleagues to Old Testament prophets. Quoting the books of Amos and Second Chronicles, "Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets," and Jehosaphat's advice to the population of Judah and Israel: "Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the Lord your God and you will be established; believe his prophets."¹⁹⁷ Mather stressed the importance of the clergy's watchmen role in a sermon given after the outbreak of war.

What though in these days Ministers are not infallible? Yet they are in respect of office *Watchmen and Seers*, and therefore you may expect that God will communicate Light to you by them, yea they told you of these days before they came. Do not say that the Ministers of God cannot tell you why this Judgment is come, how then could they give you faithful warning thereof long enough before it came?¹⁹⁸

The ability of Mather to portray himself as watchman informed by God translated into political and social power for him and the clergy as a whole.

¹⁹⁴ Mather, *The Day of Trouble is Near*, 14.

¹⁹⁵ For a concise overview of King Philip's War, see Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 168-171.

¹⁹⁶ Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, 62.

¹⁹⁷ Amos 3:7 and 2 Chronicles 20:20 from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1174 and 558.

¹⁹⁸ Mather, Increase. *An Earnest Exhortation to the Inhabitants of New England* (Boston: Foster, 1676), 8.

The outcomes of Mather's success foray into the realm of prophecy were several. First, the colonial magistrates, forced to action by public opinion and the violence of King Philip's War, held a synod with both political and religious leaders which produced a list of the twelve sins most plaguing the inhabitants of New England, a litany almost identical to Mather's 1673 sermon. The list included a "great and visible decay of godliness . . . manifestations of pride" including a general lack in deference and a shocking affinity for extravagant dressing, the existence of heretics, most notably Quakers and Anabaptists within the community. The clergy and magistrates also detected, "a notable increase in swearing and a spreading disposition to sleep at sermons", the wanton violation of the Sabbath, and the decay of family government. Within the community, the increase of contention amongst the population was exhibited by an increase in the number of lawsuits and lawyers, various sins involving sex and alcohol, an increase of lying, particularly when trying to make a sale, a decrease in business morality. Finally, the "people showed no disposition to reform and . . . they seemed utterly destitute of civic spirit."¹⁹⁹

Furthermore, the synod produced legislation that provided civil punishment for any breach of the twelve listed sins. Perry Miller wrote in reference to the synod's 1675 proclamation, "I suppose that in the whole literature of the world, including the satirists of imperial Rome, there is hardly another such uninhibited and unrelenting documentation of a people's descent into corruption."²⁰⁰

Secondly, in the political and social chaos generated by the war, Mather and the clergy emerged as a source of stability and reliable leadership. The emphasis upon a

¹⁹⁹ Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 7-8.

²⁰⁰ Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 8.

prophetic relationship with God differentiated the clergy from other colonial leaders. “It was precisely such supernatural performances that Mather thought set the ministry apart from other learned professions.”²⁰¹ Such an outcome may have been Mather’s original intent. “He craved the excitement and tumult of mass purposeful action on behalf of some holy crusade. He also understood that such public enthusiasm could not merely be wished into existence but had to be fomented, cultivated, and nurtured.”²⁰²

Mather created an environment of public religious enthusiasm through prophecy and luck. Had King Philip’s War been averted, the outcome for Mather could have been drastically altered, which resulted in prescribed covenant renewal, “when they would reenact the first church covenants of the parents and affix their own names to those terms and promises.”²⁰³ The covenant renewal ceremonies performed largely as a ritual of recruitment.

Like the Half-Way Covenant, covenant renewal ceremonies functioned more as recruiting devices to draw the rising generation into the churches on Sunday than as engines of conversion. On these occasions, parents collectively rose and promised to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. But covenant renewal did not end with corporate pledges.²⁰⁴

Rather the covenant renewal ceremony introduced a “period of intensely conversionist preaching” aimed at creating a revival atmosphere and surge in new members.²⁰⁵

Although in the long term, ministerial complaints of declension and disrespect toward the clergy continued, Mather served as the foremost spiritual leader of the colony for the remainder of the decade. In the short term, through morality legislation and an increase in

²⁰¹ Staloff, *The Making of an American Thinking Class*, 175.

²⁰² Staloff, *The Making of an American Thinking Class*, 179-180.

²⁰³ Stout, *The New England Soul*, 97.

²⁰⁴ Stout, *The New England Soul*, 98.

²⁰⁵ Stout, *The New England Soul*, 98

the number of full church members, Mather had succeeded in creating a more virtuous society.

Long before the beginning of the Bavarian Illuminati affair, the Congregational clergy adapted the jeremiad to the changing American cultural landscape. The key to extending the covenant to the new American republic was virtue. The Great Awakening temporarily suspended clerical use of the jeremiad format, but the conflicts of the later part of the century, particularly the Seven Year's War and the American Revolution, reinvigorated it. By the 1790s, historian Nathan O. Hatch found evidence of

A rebirth of the traditional jeremiad. Anxious ministers thundered against the age-old vices of 'luxury, dissipation, extravagance, gaming, idleness and intemperance.' While the content of these intensified warnings remained virtually unchanged, the interlocking motivation of judgment and promise that gave force to the jeremiad assumed a force decidedly contemporary.²⁰⁶

The importance of a virtuous citizenry for the successful operation of a republican government was well established in the founding generation. "The eighteenth-century mind was thoroughly convinced that a popularly based government 'cannot be supported without *Virtue*.' Only a public-spirited, self-sacrificing people could the authority of a popularly elected ruler be obeyed, but 'more by the virtue of the people, than by the terror of his power.'"²⁰⁷

James Madison explained the necessity of virtue to the Virginia Ratifying Convention thusly, "is there no virtue among us? If there be not, we are in a wretched situation. No theoretical checks- no form of government can render us secure. To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the

²⁰⁶ Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 161.

²⁰⁷ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, 68.

people, is a chimerical idea.”²⁰⁸ For many this represented a potential weakness in the republican form of government, “a republic was such a delicate polity precisely because it demanded an extraordinary moral character in the people.”²⁰⁹

Clergy, political leaders and newspaper editors offered constant reminders of the importance of virtue. During the Revolution, the “black regiment” extended the New England Covenant to the nation as a whole. “The repeated calls of the clergy for a return to the temperance and virtue of their ancestors made sense not only in terms of the conventional covenant theology but also, as many ministers enjoyed noting, in terms of the political science of the day.”²¹⁰

When first introduced to the New England intellectual landscape, the Whig political ideologies of republicanism, liberalism and virtue could easily be reconciled with the earlier covenanted government, which depended upon a strong cooperation between civil and religious leaders. According to Hatch, the incorporation of Whig political ideals was nearly seamless,

The fact that traditional New England vocabularies incorporated republican terms without substantive damage to Puritan forms does imply that the transition took place with a minimum of intellectual effort. New England’s strong dissenting tradition, it seems, was particularly susceptible to the eighteenth-century Commonwealth tradition; common assumptions about human nature, society, and history allowed assimilation to occur almost unnoticed.²¹¹

In other words, Puritan religious thought and republican ideology were uniquely compatible and the majority of New Englanders easily accepted the resulting union. “It is

²⁰⁸ James Madison, *Speech to the Virginia Ratifying Convention*, June 20, 1788 quoted in Buckner F. Melton Jr., Ed. *The Quotable Founding Fathers: A Treasury of 2,500 Wise and Witty Quotations from the Men and Women who Created America* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2004), 319.

²⁰⁹ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, 68.

²¹⁰ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, 117-118.

²¹¹ Hatch, *The Sacred Cause*, 92.

possible to suggest that one reason republicanism had such compelling appeal for New Englanders is that they could follow its dictates without consciously rejecting their past.”²¹²

This ability for the clergy to shape interpretations of republicanism speaks to the continued powerful social influence of the sermon in New England. Although historians such as Bernard Bailyn have focused on the importance of the political pamphlet, in colonial America, and New England especially, the sermon reached a far larger audience and enjoyed greater influence. To historian Harry S. Stout, the New England sermon’s “topical range and social influence were so powerful in shaping cultural values, meanings, and a sense of corporate purpose that even television pales in comparison.”²¹³ This role as revolutionary interpreters reinforced the clergy’s colonial role as social watchmen.

Throughout the country, but especially in the New England states, the refrain of virtue echoed in public and private spaces. For his 1787 Harvard commencement, John Quincy Adams delivered a senior oration entitled “The Importance and Necessity of Public Faith to the Well being of a Nation.” As early as 1776, his father John Adams lamented the lack of virtue in American society in a letter to his wife Abigail, “Unfaithfulness in public stations is deeply criminal. But there is no encouragement to be faithful. Neither Profit, nor Honor, nor Applause is acquired by faithfulness. But I know by what. There is too much corruption, even in this infant Age of our Republic. Virtue is

²¹² Hatch, *The Sacred Cause*, 95.

²¹³ Stout, *The New England Soul*, 3.

not in fashion. Vice is not infamous.”²¹⁴ Adams, of course, was venting his frustrations with the Continental Congress, but by the 1790s, the New England clergy had embarked on an endeavor to make virtue fashionable and vice infamous in American society in general, and New England society in particular.

A great number of clergymen addressed virtue in sermon form throughout the decade including such well-known figures as William Emerson, Jeremy Belknap, John Thornton Kirkland and Joseph Buckminster. Their May 9, 1798 sermons demonstrate the relatively mild form of jeremiad used by these members of Boston’s liberal clergy. Nearly all of these men addressed a decline in religious observation, which was particularly worrisome because Congregational ministers equated the success of the republican experiment in the United States with the meticulous observation of religious obligations.

Kirkland reminded his congregation on the 1798 fast day that “Religion is the grand support of morality. The nation in modern times, where the altar has been overthrown, afford an awful and experimental proof of this condition; among other instances, in a law of divorce, tending to weaken all the domestic ties and poison virtue and happiness in the fountain.”²¹⁵ On the same day, across town at Boston’s Federal Street Church, Jeremy Belknap drew upon the familiar comparison between the Roman republic and the fledgling American republic. “For the Roman empire was at first strong and terrible. Whilst the spirit of true liberty animated their constitution: whilst public

²¹⁴ John Adams, letter to Abigail Adams September 22, 1776 (Adams Electronic Archive, Massachusetts Historical Society) <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17760922ja&numrecs=13&archive=all&hi=on&mode=&query=virtue%20and%20republic&queryid=&rec=8&start=1&tag=text#firstmatch> (accessed 10 April 2007).

²¹⁵ John Thornton Kirkland, *A Sermon, Delivered on the 9th of May, 1798. Being the Day of a National Fast Recommended by the President of the United States*. (Boston: Russell, 1798), 16.

virtue and genuine patriotism were the ruling principles, their councils were firm, and their arms were victorious.”²¹⁶ Throughout the New England states, the clergy interpreted the decline in church attendance and the popularity of evangelical and enlightenment faiths as part of the overall decline in public virtue. To the clergy, this upsurge in irreligion spelled doomed for the republican experiment in America.

Jedidiah Morse would take the condemnation of public vice, particularly in the form of nonattendance on the Sabbath and lack of proper respect for political and religious leaders, a step farther than the liberal clergy. Several aspects of the political, social and religious climate of the 1790s created a feeling of status anxiety within the orthodox clergy, in which Morse was a leading member, and set the stage for the rebirth of the jeremiad.

In the years after the Revolution, the ideals of the struggle had taken root in all aspects of American society. Republicanism and its tenets of liberty and virtue influenced far more than government and politics; the republican spirit of the age shaped the cultural climate in ways unforeseen by the political and social elites who had supported the revolution. The Massachusetts clergy did not expect this sort of development when they assisted the spread and acceptance of Revolutionary ideals. From their pulpits these men witnessed what they termed, “. . . pride and selfishness, vice and irreligion, joined with a spirit of general slumber” infesting society.²¹⁷

The clergy’s intense status anxiety and reservations toward the morality of the American populace fostered a rebirth of the colonial jeremiad with a few important

²¹⁶ Jeremy Belknap, *A Sermon, Delivered on the 9th of May, 1798, the Day of the National Fast, Recommended by the President of the United States* (Boston: Hall, 1798), 12.

²¹⁷ Convention of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts Ministers, *An Address . . . to their Christian Brethren . . . May 30th, 1799*, (Boston, 1799), 2.

alterations. The earlier jeremiads of Edwards and Mather predicted divine retribution in the form of disease, war, famine and other natural disasters, such as fire and floods. In the jeremiads of the Early Republic, the clergy prophesied a very different sort of punishment, the dissolution of the union and the end of republican government.

There are other important differences between the colonial and Early Republican jeremiad aside from the form of punishment. One of the most prominent divergences is the vastly different role of God in the sermons of Increase Mather and Jedidiah Morse. Mather's God is a vengeful one; throughout his sermons, he reminds his listeners that God does indeed punish his people, with examples from the Old Testament, and that any trial or disaster that befell them was from the hand of God. In his 1674 sermon *A Day of Trouble is Near*, Mather reminded his listeners that God is the source of all judgment, and the covenant between the people of New England and God offered no protection from his wrath; the Bible provided numerous examples that "That God does sometimes bring times of great trouble upon his people."²¹⁸

Mather drew consistent parallels between the biblical trials faced by the Israelites and the social chaos of his own day. God punished the Israelites by using the armies of the empires of the ancient world, including Assyria, Babylon and Egypt. Likewise, in New England, God delivered his punishment through the actions of the local native population.

Alas that New England should be brought so low in so short a time (for she is come down wonderfully) and that by such vile enemies, by the heathen, yea the worst of the heathen: that should be an affecting humbling consideration to us, that our heavenly father should be provoked to set vile Indians upon the backs of his children to scourge them so severely.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Mather, *The Day of Trouble is Near*, 3.

²¹⁹ Mather, *An Earnest Exhortation*, 2.

In a very different interpretation, Morse also predicted terrible punishment for the sins of his society, but in this case, a benevolent God served as the protector and potential rescuer of the sinful. Morse also reminded his congregation of the lessons contained in the Old Testament,

Whatever be our situation as a nation, whether we be at peace or at war; in prosperity or adversity; in harmony or at variance amongst ourselves; serious and constant in our worship and service of the true God, or in a state of declension, idolatry, and general licentiousness of principles and manners, we may learn from some part of this history, what is our duty, and what treatment we have to expect from the righteous Governor of the World. This history of Divine Providence proves its consistency and uniformity.²²⁰

While atheism threatened the very existence of the nation, the hand of God was posed to protect the inhabitants if they only worship him properly with the aide of his chosen watchmen, the orthodox clergy. These two interpretations of God represent dramatic changes in New England religion as it evolved from Puritanism to Congregationalism for a wide variety of reasons, among them the evangelical influence of the Great Awakening, shifts in theology, and political changes amongst others. Significantly, it was also differing interpretations of God's relationship with humans, different reactions to the evangelical enthusiasm of the Great Awakening, and other shifts in theology, including skepticism of the divinity of Jesus and the rejection of predestination that fractured the unity of the Congregational clergy. This lack of unity severely restricted the political and social power of the orthodox clergy.

On the political front, according to Morse, the dissolution of the American republic was the goal of the Bavarian Illuminati; however, the rampant vice apparent in society alone was enough to affect the ruin of the republic,

²²⁰ Morse, *A Sermon Preached at Charlestown, November 29, 1798*, 5.

Vice is hostile to freedom. A wicked people cannot long remain a free people. If, as a nation, we progress in impiety, demoralization, and licentiousness, for twenty years to come, as rapidly as we have for twenty years past, this circumstance alone will be sufficient, without the aide of any other cause, to subvert our present government.²²¹

The same widespread vice that would eventually destroy the republic also made the nation susceptible to the designs of atheist groups. Here lay the true power of the Bavarian Illuminati threat; it allowed the clergy to connect the atheism and violent excess of the French Revolution with professed deism and Francophile sentiments of presidential candidate Thomas Jefferson. The only means of avoiding the dangerous aims of the Bavarian Illuminati was through the proper worship of God, facilitated by the clergy.

The jeremiad addresses a litany of sins including irreligion, pride, greed, corruption, extravagance, idleness and disrespect for the clergy. The most important sin for understanding the jeremiad qualities of Morse's Bavarian Illuminati sermons is irreligion. In his first sermon addressing the Illuminati threat Morse said, "I use this word [irreligion] in a comprehensive sense, and would be understood to mean by it, contempt of all religion and moral obligation, impiety, and everything that opposes itself to true Christianity."²²²

The conservative leadership of New England, political and religious, agreed upon the threat posed by irreligion. The more difficult task lay in convincing the public. A strong historical connection allowed the clergy to demonstrate the consequences of ignoring Providence; clergy used both Biblical imagery and familiar historical precedent to illustrate the scope and power of the present crisis. While politicians held forth the

²²¹ Morse, *A Sermon Preached at Charlestown, November 29, 1798*, 12.

²²² Morse, *A Sermon . . . May 9th, 1798*, 17.

Roman Republic as a shining example of America's republican heritage, the clergy saw a solemn lesson in the Roman narrative and urged their congregations to remember "That like causes produce like effects, and learn wisdom from the fatal experiences of other nations."²²³ In the capable hands of Morse, the history of Rome became a cautionary tale exhibiting the importance of religion for a healthy republic.

While the Roman people followed the great principle of religion, he argued,

They were virtuous, free, and invincible. But when the *Atheistical* doctrine of *Epicurus* had insinuated itself among them under the fascinating title of *philosophy*, it by degrees undermined and destroyed this great principle, and with it that 'individual simplicity of manners, and enthusiasm of public virtue . . . and pious attention to the improvement of the morals of the people by religion, which, in all countries are the strong pillars by which every political society is sustained.'²²⁴

Thus, Rome fell not because of the barbarian invasions, but because of irreligion.

Ominously, Morse predicted the same fate for America because "the same philosophy which ruined Rome has been revived in the present age, and is now widely spreading its desolations over the world. Its contagious influence has reached us, and is visibly marring the foundations of all our most precious interests."²²⁵ Morse and others reckoned the emergence of rational religion, termed deism by most but atheism by the conservative clergy, symbolized a return of a dangerous, incendiary philosophy. The clergy believed the American state was as morally weak as the Roman state had been before its fall.

The main purpose of Morse's 1798 and 1799 jeremiads was to reassert the clergy's moral and social authority through a renewal of the clergy's traditional social role by identifying an outside force that posed a danger to all aspects of American

²²³ Morse, *A Sermon, Preached November 29th, 1798*, 14.

²²⁴ Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25, 1799*, 29-30.

²²⁵ Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25th, 1799*, 30.

society. In the colonial past the clergy had functioned as “as social guardians or ‘watchmen,’” and “were responsible for being on the lookout for divine warnings and, when they appeared, bringing the people together for a diagnosis of their spiritual ills and for corrective actions.”²²⁶ Over the course of generations, the New England Congregational clergy grew accustomed to interpreting not only religious theology, but also political and social events.

They perceived themselves to be in a position of moral oversight; in fact, many came to view the ministry as a public office. In the words of historian Donald M. Scott, “The ministry in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England was a form of public office . . . [which] had particular responsibility for the preservation of social order.”²²⁷ Attempting to recreate this social role, Morse declared himself a watchman in each of his fast sermons. In 1798, he revealed his rationale for exposing the Bavarian Illuminati threat.

I hold it a duty, my brethren, which I owe to God, the cause of religion, to my country, and to you, to declare to you, thus honestly and faithfully, these truths. My only aim is to awaken in you and myself a due attention, at this alarming period, to our dearest interests. As a faithful watchman I would give you warning of your present danger.²²⁸

In 1799, after a year of fierce opposition from some members of the liberal clergy and his political opponents, Morse still insisted providing warnings of coming events was an important part of his clerical duties.

That our present situation is uncommonly critical and perilous, although opinions greatly vary as to the sources and degrees of our danger. With all the frankness and plainness becoming an honest and faithful watchmen, I intend, my brethren, to lay before you what I humbly conceive to be our real and most alarming

²²⁶ Stout, *The New England Soul*, 28.

²²⁷ Donald M. Scott quoted in Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness*, 59.

²²⁸ Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered . . . May 9, 1798*, 25.

dangers, those which have a malign aspect, both on our religious and our political welfare.²²⁹

During the colonial period, the clergy enjoyed a close working relationship with the civil authorities, and while colonial Massachusetts was not a theocracy, the clergy managed to exert a great deal of political power from their participation in an advisory capacity and from the pulpit. Morse's attempts to reassert the moral authority of the clergy held important political implications. By continually displaying himself as a social watchman, Morse revealed his desperate desire to reaffirm the clergy's traditional political power.

Unfortunately for Morse and his ambitions, a disregard for fact-checking coupled with the division between liberal and orthodox clergymen would bury the message contained within his finely crafted jeremiads. Ironically, the credit for the ultimate destruction of Morse's New Jerusalem, his utopian vision of republican New England, would not be the insidious aims of a foreign anti-republican and anti-religion faction, but the decades-old divisions between New England Congregational divines. Some of these divisions dated to the debates regarding the adoption of the Half-Way Covenant in the mid-seventeenth century and the aftermath of the Great Awakening. Others were much more recent and more political than theological or spiritual.

During the Revolutionary War and Washington administration, New England Congregationalists presented a united front. "They generally stood together in their public pronouncements, although theological segmentation did contribute to a breakdown in consensus regarding the national covenant."²³⁰ The beginning of serious competition between clergy with different theological loyalties had many causes; one early issue that

²²⁹ Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25th, 1799*, 9.

²³⁰ Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness*, 25.

split the clerical opinion was the Illuminati crisis of 1798 and 1799. Morse and his orthodox, Old Calvinist supporters emphasized the social role of the church, a role they saw diminishing and desperately tried to rescue. The liberal Congregationalists stressed the importance of theology and dedicated their efforts to maintaining the theological purity of the Congregational Church.

Liberal Congregationalists such as William Bentley found the clerical role advocated by Jedidiah Morse unacceptable. While Morse believed he advocated a return to past religious tradition, the liberal Congregationalists felt quite the opposite. They believed his actions polluted the church and altered the role of the minister. For liberals, more engaged with intellectual and theological pursuits than civic involvement, the political scheming of orthodox clergymen was reprehensible.

The public reaction to the Bavarian Illuminati threat is difficult to judge, yet the language of letters in the newspaper war clearly point to embattled liberal and orthodox Congregationalists. The large number of ministers who addressed the Illuminati in fast day sermons on April 25, 1799, the extensive reprinting of Morse's sermon as far as Philadelphia and South Carolina, and the ready market for printed copies of Morse's sermon, suggest a great deal of acceptance.²³¹

In an article discussing the clerical opinion of the French Revolution, Gary B. Nash described the response to Morse's 1798 sermon as largely positive. "Already inflamed by the XYZ Affair, newspapers editors, clergymen, politicians, and private citizens echoed the charges, calling for the extermination of the alien influence and affirming the need for social unity, conservative government, and a revival of

²³¹ For examples see: *Porcupine's Gazette*, 1799-02-25, *Porcupine's Gazette*, 1799-01-03, and *South Carolina Gazette and Timothy's Daily Advertiser*, 1799-02-08.

religion.”²³² Despite the anti-elite climate of the 1790s, all of Morse’s printed fast day sermons appear with a note of approval from the listeners on the title page. This suggests that the sermons received the endorsement of the influential lay members of the Congregation entrusted with selecting sermons for print. Morse may also have received the support of local Federalist politicians present on the special occasion, who found the Bavarian Illuminati conspiracy a means of furthering their political goals.

During the fall of 1799, the conflict over the Illuminati threat took center stage in several Massachusetts and Connecticut newspapers, including the *Independent Chronicle*, the *Bee*, the *Massachusetts Spy*, the *Constitutional Telegraph* and the *American Mercury*. It was not the conflict envisioned by Morse, instead of banding together to present a united front against the Illuminati and the possible dangerous outcome of the approaching election, the Congregational Church divided between those who supported Morse and those who did not. The most important factor in determining which members of society would ultimately support Morse and his conservative Congregationalist brethren was political. The New Englanders who challenged Morse in the newspapers all expressed sentiments compatible with Democratic-Republican political doctrine.

The first letters questioning Morse’s motives appeared shortly after his May 1798 fast day sermon. By April 1799 the critics had seemingly grown in number and outspoken disregard for Morse. The *Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser* published a letter from an American citizen concerned with Morse’s motives for exposing the Illuminati conspiracy. The writer admitted to being intrigued with the origin and reliability of Morse’s principle source, *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions*

²³² Gary B. Nash, “The American Clergy and the French Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (1965), 392.

and Governments of Europe, “Being rather surprised that a publication of the authenticity and consequence which Dr. Morse attached to this, should have so little excited the attention of the public, and that the facts which it presents should not have been more generally known.”²³³

“An American” questioned the authenticity of Robison’s book and included a review published by *The Critical Review or Annals of Literature* a London publication, from 1797. The review declared the society innocent of all charges and seriously criticized Robison, declaring “The object of our author seems therefore to be absurd in the extreme, and we should throw aside with the utmost contempt . . . [the Illuminati] is of no more consequence than the history of Old Codgers, Jerusalem Bricks, Merry Boys and similar clubs, which have their meetings in and about London.”²³⁴

The author continued in his letter to question Dr. Morse’s possible motives. “Charity forbids us to suppose that Dr. Morse would hazard his reputation as a Scholar, his character as a Patriot, or his candor as a Christian, by holding up a work, which is ‘calculated to excite alarms in the public,’ without pretty decided proofs of its good authority and correctness . . . But Mr. Morse has in a public and solemn manner, indirectly pledged himself for the authenticity of an extraordinary publication by adopting its sentiments, and recommending it to his countrymen.”²³⁵ This letter identified Morse as the source of the conspiracy and intimately attached his reputation to the accuracy of the publication.

²³³ *The Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, Thursday, May 24- to Monday, May 28, 1798.

²³⁴ *The Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, May 24- to Monday, May 28, 1798.

²³⁵ *The Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, May 24- to Monday, May 28, 1798.

Three consecutive letters with a similar theme also appeared in the *Independent Chronicle* between May 6 and June 3, 1799. They were each signed, “A Friend to a Real Clergyman, and an Enemy to Bigots,” Like the letter by “An American,” this series questioned Morse’s motives for releasing the Illuminati information.

Much more damning, the final letter accused Morse of neglecting his ministerial duties. First, “A Friend” criticized Morse for the content of his fast day and thanksgiving sermons. “On a Thanksgiving of Fast day they [the public] expect to have their hearts enlarged with the most grateful adorations of the Supreme Being; they expect to meet together in love, and to separate in friendship; to contemplate the blessings of Heaven, and to implore its protection.”²³⁶ This criticism probably offended Morse deeply, but the next accusation cut more deeply at his pride and ambition. The writer advised the clergy to look inward for the cause of recent irreligion. “You have disgusted people with a constant repetition of false alarms, and when they find that your vouchers are as visionary as the fancy of a distempered mind, your predications and sermons are nearly as much unnoticed as the *quack handbills* of a mountebank, or the catchpenny puffs of a strolling player.”²³⁷

Furthermore, the writer claimed the clergy had sullied their reputations with their involvement, “for when we find that you propagate one falsehood, we naturally suppose the whole subject to be of the same material.”²³⁸ Thus, in the span of a two-column open letter Jedidiah Morse became the parson who cried conspiracy. Numerous letter writers to the various New England papers expressed the opinion that Morse had devoted too much

²³⁶ *The Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, Thursday, May 30, - Monday, June 3.

²³⁷ *The Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, May 30, - Monday, June 3.

²³⁸ *The Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, May 30, - Monday, June 3.

time to geography and political intrigue and not enough to the spiritual health of his congregation. Morse had advocated a stance for the clergy above the political and social fray. By implementing the watchman role, Morse anticipated the clergy would continue to receive the traditional respect and deference, but in his choice of public forum and public motivation, he instead embroiled his clerical supporters directly in the fray, he sought to avoid and he left himself open for attack.

Morse was not entirely without support. A few community members came to his aid in print. One anonymous letter writer referred to the oppositional press as “lying vehicles of slander” and predicted the “honest men” deceived by printed misrepresentations of Morse’s message would “be used hereafter as the instruments of a revolution, which shall exalt atheism and anarchy on the ruins of public peace and established laws.”²³⁹ Such displays of support were increasingly rare after William Bentley appeared as a prominent opponent of Morse.

Boston born and Harvard educated, William Bentley had been pastor of Salem’s second Congregational Church since 1783. He was a member of the liberal branch of Congregationalism, which would soon break off to become Unitarianism. Because of his position in Salem, his Harvard education and his Democratic-Republican sympathies, Bentley emphasized good works over rigid Calvinist doctrine. For twenty years, beginning in 1797, Bentley wrote twice-weekly columns for the *Salem Gazette* discussing news and politics. Decidedly liberal-minded, Bentley often shared his pulpit with preachers from other sects. Unlike Morse, Bentley apparently harbored no political ambitions, content instead to tutor promising students and use his own salary to support

²³⁹ *Commercial Advertiser*, 1799-06-08.

the poorer members of his congregation. Bentley did twice decline the offer of prominent positions from Thomas Jefferson suggesting he had strong political connections. In summary, he was the antithesis of Jedidiah Morse.²⁴⁰

With his background and connections, it was logical that Bentley would challenge Morse's presentation of the Bavarian Illuminati threat. Already connected to area newspapers, Bentley used the newspaper column to discredit Morse and the theory of a conspiracy by the Bavarian Illuminati. This choice of medium allowed Bentley to reach a wide audience, "By linking regions together with bonds of political consciousness, interconnected partisan newspapers were a nationalizing influence, a literal arm of government connecting the extended republic through chains of information."²⁴¹

In his earliest denunciation of the Bavarian Illuminati, Bentley expressed no harsh feelings toward the clergy he believed had been misled by ignorance and the present cultural climate. In early 1799, he published under the pseudonym Cornelius a pamphlet entitled *Extracts from Professor Robinson's "Proofs of Conspiracy" with Brief Reflections*, which documented the various inconsistencies and illogical arguments that he believed crippled Robison's text, damaged his credibility. Bentley believed a few bad apples influenced the orthodox Congregationalists, "But into this order men will intrude, who have studied their Bible, and not mankind for whom it was written. Who know more of their own opinions from dogmas, than from history and investigation."²⁴² Bentley believed the clergy suffered undue influence from unscrupulous and ambitious

²⁴⁰ Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley*.

²⁴¹ Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 123.

²⁴² William Bentley, *A Charge Delivered Before the Morning Star Lodge in Worcester, Massachusetts, Upon the Festival of Saint John the Baptist*. (Worcester: Thomas, 1798), 8-9.

individuals and from their own personal ignorance and intolerance. He remained hopeful that “the scandal will be removed, when the order becomes enlightened.”²⁴³

In closing Bentley offered forgiveness to Morse, whom he believed had not willfully misled the public. “We must leave Robison to an inquisitive public, and forgive a worthy divine who noticed the book, and has made our order ridiculous, even by applause on such an occasion. May the fate of Zimmerman be never the fate of Robison, or the American Geographer!”²⁴⁴ In June 1798, Bentley believed responsible scholarship and shared morals would quickly prove the Bavarian Illuminati a false threat, but the increased accusations held in Morse’s Thanksgiving sermon and the lack of inquiries from the public into the validity of Morse’s claims proved him mistaken.

Morse responded to Bentley’s attacks by sending reviews praising *Proofs of Conspiracy* to the Boston papers. Feeling this tactic insufficient to vindicate his reputation and his actions, Morse began to submit open letters to various Boston papers defending himself and Robison. Meanwhile, both Morse and Bentley sought irrefutable proof for their own position from abroad, through correspondence with German geographer Christoph Ebeling. In 1799, Ebeling wrote them similar letters explaining the existence of the Bavarian Illuminati.

According to Ebeling, the Illuminati had been formed several decades earlier to oppose the Jesuits. Confident the order was now defunct; Ebeling claimed their only goals had been liberalization in church and state. Ebeling also addressed Robison’s text, “Ebeling ridiculed *Proofs of Conspiracy* for its many erroneous statements about the men whom it described, and he even charged that it was written as propaganda at the behest of

²⁴³ Bentley, *A Charge Delivered before the Morning Star Lodge*, 11.

²⁴⁴ Bentley, *A Charge Delivered before the Morning Star Lodge*, 31.

officials in the British government.”²⁴⁵ Shortly after Morse received his letter rumors began to circulate about its contents.

Some of the more outrageous rumors claimed that charges of forgery and insanity forced Robison to flee Britain. None of these rumors were true, but public curiosity had been piqued. In response to letters questioning Ebeling’s statements, Morse wrote that, “Though Ebeling indeed had ridiculed and rejected both Robison’s and Barruel’s representations of the Illuminati, his letter had actually supported their charges. Ebeling had said that the Illuminati did exist.”²⁴⁶ Morse managed to stretch the truth regarding the Ebeling letter until an alleged extract, that was in fact a fraud, appeared in the *American Mercury*. The extract claimed to contain snippets of the letter written by Ebeling to “an eagle-eyed detector of *Illuminatism*” in America.²⁴⁷

Not unlike the legitimate British reviews that had appeared in American newspapers for over a year, the extract of the alleged Ebeling letter referred to *Proofs of Conspiracy* as a “catch-penny production, and the facts alleged in it unknown to any body besides the author.”²⁴⁸ The printing of the alleged letter extract may have been harmless, but William Bentley was among the paper’s readership and he seized the opportunity to irrevocably refute the existence of the Bavarian Illuminati threat.

There had been many public calls for Morse to publish his letter from Ebeling, including one in the September 26 edition of the *American Mercury*. “Many people wonder why the Rev. *Granny*, who has officiated at the birth of so many *Mice*, (when Mountains have travailed) has not published the letter he has lately received from

²⁴⁵ Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 86.

²⁴⁶ Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse*, 87.

²⁴⁷ *American Mercury*, 1799-09-26.

²⁴⁸ *American Mercury*, 1799-09-26.

Professor Ebeling: many others suppose he will publish it is an Appendix to his next Fast-Day Sermon.”²⁴⁹ Morse ignored the taunts and steadfastly refused to allow the letter to be printed. Extremely proud of his extensive correspondence, Morse, like others of his day believed “a correspondence was a mutual exchange of respect and trust” and maintained that he did not have Ebeling’s permission to print his letter.²⁵⁰ Such niceties, however, did not stop Bentley.

In October, Bentley sent his letter from Ebeling to the *Massachusetts Spy*. The letter appeared in early October with the following vague introduction: “A Gentleman in this State, who has a literary Correspondent in Germany, has lately received the following Letter from his friend in that Country, on the subject of Robison’s Book of Illuminati, &c. As that book has been such much the subject of conversation, the Letter may be interesting to some of our Readers.”²⁵¹ Although purposefully misleading, the introduction was not technically a lie. Bentley was indeed a correspondent of Ebeling and had received such a letter. The contents were particularly damaging to Morse, as a reading of the letter demonstrated that Ebeling most certainly did not support Robison’s claims, and that he claimed Bavarian government had suppressed and extinguished the Illuminati many years before.

Bentley’s letter, attributed to Morse largely because of the letter’s vague introduction and despite Morse’s strong denial, appeared in papers up and down the Atlantic seaboard, including in Philadelphia’s partisan Democratic-Republican *Aurora*. Within the span of a few weeks, Morse became an object of national ridicule. The clerical

²⁴⁹ *American Mercury*, 1799-09-26.

²⁵⁰ Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 141.

²⁵¹ *Massachusetts Spy, or Worcester Gazette*, 1799-10-09.

campaign in shambles and his supporters absent, Morse finally conceded to print his letter. William Bentley celebrated Morse's complete defeat in his diary,

In yesterday's gazette we had the last roar of poor Morse. His only fort was in recourse to vulgar prejudice. He did not dare to meet the argument fairly. He ranted upon the zeal of Masons in his old Copie [sic] of Robison, then condemned all Secret Societies, & after saying that 3/4s of what had been said was nothing to the point, he ended by saying nothing was understood.²⁵²

After, Morse conceded to print his letter from Ebeling, he made no more reference to the Bavarian Illuminati conspiracy.

A few diehard supporters claimed Morse's so-called political allies had misled him. "The doctor, however zealous he may be in hunting up and making the most of every thing that looks like evidence in support of his favorite dogmas, would not, I believe, commit so gross an aberration from truth as to forge so malicious a calumny. His informant in this case, I am well informed, was *Oliver Wolcott, esq.*"²⁵³ Most considered him a fraud. The clergy that had supported his desperate attempt to cling to the status quo, even Dwight, had deserted him.

After the publication of Morse's letter, discussion of the Bavarian Illuminati threat ceased. Later jeremiahs would occasionally resurrect the possibility of a threat to government and religion with the Bavarian Illuminati, perhaps because it was such a perfectly engineered threat to American mentalities. But for Morse and his cohorts, the potential of the Bavarian Illuminati had been spent. Proven a fraud, with no possibility of debate, Jedidiah Morse had seemingly lost his bid to preserve clerical authority and with it the possibility of establishing a New Jerusalem on American soil.

²⁵² Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley*, 291.

²⁵³ *The Bee*, 1799-12-11.

CONCLUSION

THE NEW JERUSALEM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

William Bentley's portrayal of the Bavarian Illuminati threat as a fraud did not represent the end of Jedidiah Morse's attempts to fashion a religious utopia on American soil. Just as he had adopted the jeremiad formula from his Puritan predecessors, so he also adopted their resiliency. Over the course of the next two decades, Morse became active in the growing antislavery movement, working with both the American Colonization Society and the leaders of the free black community around Boston. He also worked closely with missionary societies, both American and British, aimed at Christianizing and civilizing the American Indian. He maintained his leadership of the conservative branch of the Congregational clergy through his pulpit in Charlestown, and he continued to serve as editor of the *Panoplist* and play a very active role in the establishment of an orthodox seminary in Andover, Massachusetts. Until his death in 1826, he continued to produce almost yearly revised editions of his *American Geography*, earning him the title "father of American geography."

His later career was not without controversy, the most important perhaps the dispute surrounding the replacement for the Hollis Professorship of Divinity at Harvard. Morse naturally favored himself for the influential post, and the selection of Henry Ware marked a decided victory for the liberals. The battle for the divinity post was a fierce one. Determined the public should be aware of his side of the argument Morse published a

pamphlet entitled, *The True Reasons On Which the Election of a Hollis Professor of Divinity in Harvard College, Was Opposed by the Board of Overseers*. Morse's anger at this defeat lead him to pursue a separate publication for the orthodox clergy, *Panoplist*, and the new seminary at Andover, deepening the divide between liberal and orthodox. At the last, Morse's desire to fill the social watchmen role put him at odds with his fellow clergy, his congregation and future direction of the Congregational Church, but the purpose of this study is not to provide a biography of Jedidiah Morse. The Bavarian Illuminati affair holds significance apart from its primary spokesman. The actions of Jedidiah Morse and his colleagues represent a significant turning point in the refashioning of the American jeremiad and, therefore, point toward broader currents in American cultural history.

The meaning of the Bavarian Illuminati affair only becomes clear when the event is examined in its political, social and religious contexts. The only way to unpack the meaning of the Bavarian Illuminati affair is to consider all aspects of Morse's and the orthodox clergy's involvement. This study has sought to discuss the complicated situation in which the orthodox Congregational clergy found themselves at the close of the eighteenth century and to provide some sense of the intense social anxiety they felt. The orthodox clergy felt their social role becoming obsolete, and they were determined to prevent that outcome.

On the political front, the era of the election sermon and the fast day was slipping away. Despite their active role in the revolutionary struggle, there were few opportunities in the new republic for the clergy to guide the political decisions of their communities. Much more ominously, the Federalist star was sinking and with it New England's

political influence. Socially, American society was changing rapidly, deference melting away and community demographics changing as New Englanders took part in the nineteenth century march west. Public criticism of the clergy abounded: of their involvement in politics, their elitist manner and their education. Finally, the role of religion in early national America was changing, and in the orthodox clergy's opinion, changing for the worse. Most threatening was the growth of evangelical sects and the increasing support for disestablishment. Thus, the orthodox clergy felt themselves beset by opposition on all sides.

Historian Sacvan Bercovitch described the Federalist Jeremiahs as linked to the Puritan past. "They were berating the present generation for deviating from the past in order to prod it forward toward their vision of the future. In ritual terms, they were asserting consensus through anxiety, using promise and threat alike to inspire (or enforce) generational rededication."²⁵⁴ Morse and his cohorts held very specific millennial expectations for the American republic or the New Jerusalem as they imagined it. They firmly believed the American republic could not survive without a virtuous citizenry, and the only means of maintaining a virtuous citizenry, in their opinion, was through regular church attendance and deference to the leadership of educated leaders.

Accordingly, they envisioned a very precise and narrow path toward achieving their goal and were not inclined to accept any deviation. Therefore, when examined within its political, social and religious context the Bavarian Illuminati affair very clearly becomes much more than a diverting historical footnote or an example of mass hysteria amongst the clergy. It represents an attempt by Morse and his cohorts to use anxiety to

²⁵⁴ Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, 136.

prod their congregations toward their vision of the future, and it was an outstanding failure.

The sermons produced in response to the Bavarian Illuminati threat marked the end of an era in New England's religious rhetoric. The New England Puritans held a cyclical view of history; they drew parallels between their present situation and the Old Testament. Their view of themselves as a covenanted people, a modern day band of Israelites wandering in the wilderness of New England, left them in constant expectation of a rapidly approaching millennium. When one prophesized Second Coming failed to materialize on the set date, they were quick to establish another.

Likewise, the defeat of one threat to everything their society held dear- political, social and religious- cleared the way for a new, more encompassing threat. Throughout two hundred years of New England history, the Anti-Christ adopted numerous guises, the Bavarian Illuminati just one in a long series. One early period of intense millennial expectations, political unpredictability and social change precipitated the Half-Way Covenant.

The links between the Bavarian Illuminati affair and the Half-Way Covenant controversy demonstrate how both of these events functioned as turning points in New England culture. The Half-Way Covenant marks a turning point in New England history in many respects, but perhaps most significantly it represents a shift in focus.

Disappointed by the failure of the Puritan movement in England, New England's spiritual leaders began to view New England as the site of the Second Coming. The intense scrutiny faced by potential church members and the clergy's zealous efforts to ensure

subsequent generations of members through the theological wrangling that became the Half-Way Covenant mark a change in expectations.

In a 1668 sermon entitled, *New England's True Interest; Not to Lie*, William Stoughton spoke of this shift in focus, "The Lords promises, and expectations of great things, have singled out *New-England*, and all sorts of ranks of men amongst us, above any Nation or people in the world."²⁵⁵ In his examination of the jeremiad tradition in *The American Jeremiad*, Sacvan Bercovitch argued that one of the primary characteristics of the New England jeremiad that differentiated it from its European progenitor was "its unshakable optimism."²⁵⁶ The optimistic message of the Puritan jeremiad remains contentious amongst historians. Few would argue against the positive nature of the American version of millennialism that developed during and after the Revolution.

The successful creation of American republican government, the resurgence of evangelical religious fervor, and a period of rapid technological and scientific innovation stimulated a more hopeful and optimistic view: that the millennium would follow not a violent apocalypse or catastrophic conflagration, but successful efforts to defeat godlessness, irreligion, materialism, and selfishness and to establish a virtuous, just order on earth.²⁵⁷ The orthodox clergy, although few of them were experiencing an increase in church membership, actively ascribed to this new, hopeful view of the millennium and, as demonstrated, were actively engaged in establishing the new virtuous and just order.

²⁵⁵ William Stoughton, *New England's True Interest; Not to Lie* (Cambridge, MA: Samuel Green and Marmaduke Johnson, 1670, 17.

²⁵⁶ Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, 7.

²⁵⁷ Steven Mintz, "The Promise of the Millennium" excerpted from *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) reprinted in *Critical Issues in American Religious History, A Reader*, Robert R. Mathison, ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2001), 166.

Despite their commitment to the new positive interpretation of millennialism, in many ways the orthodox clergy were not engaged with the present state of society. They sought to preserve the social watchmen role of the clergy and in propagating the Bavarian Illuminati threat they used the new rhetoric of the post-Revolution jeremiad. They extended the covenant to all American citizens and portrayed God as a protector rather than a punisher, but they did not alter the basic message. They still sought to frighten their listeners into submission, requiring them to play a passive role in the creation of the New Jerusalem. For themselves alone they reserved the active role of social watchmen, the responsibility of interpreting events for their flock and advising them on the best course of action.

The significance of the Bavarian Illuminati affair lies in the utter failure of the orthodox Jeremiahs to sway the public with their message. Whatever terror the Bavarian Illuminati terror inspired in May of 1798 had largely been spent by Thanksgiving of the same year. Most damaging to the orthodox message of impending punishment was the lack of unity amongst the Congregational clergy and the resulting public attacks by their liberal colleagues. As the career of Jedidiah Morse demonstrates, after the collapse of the Bavarian Illuminati crisis the orthodox clergy found themselves searching for a new means of establishing their vision of an ideal American society. They needed to refashion the jeremiad to fit the changing currents of American society.

The New England Jeremiad tradition had been carefully adapted to New England social, religious and political conditions over the course of nearly two centuries. The Bavarian Illuminati sermons represent a final attempt by the orthodox clergy to resuscitate the increasingly marginalized power and influence of the pulpit. As already

recounted, the influence of the sermon was unparalleled in New England colonial society, the sermon's "topical range and social influence were so powerful in shaping cultural values, meanings, and a sense of corporate purpose that even television pales in comparison."²⁵⁸ One important goal of the Bavarian Illuminati sermons was to bring people into the pews with the threat of a society with the express aim "to root out and abolish Christianity, and overturn all civil government."²⁵⁹ And to keep them in the pews through their desire and duty to uphold the covenant. When the traditional means of creating societal change failed dramatically, the clergy were forced to completely alter their tactics.

Historians have often noticed the increasingly popularity of reform movements in New England during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Historian Steven Mintz has identified a loss of political power and the growing separation between church and state as precipitating this change. As many pockets of New England society became disillusioned with the American republican experiment, "reform seemed a providential means of restoring order and morality to American society."²⁶⁰ The orthodox Congregational clergy, disappointed by the changing political, social and religious currents of republican America, were searching for a new role. Their embrace of reform movements allowed the orthodox clergy to continue their battle against vice in creating a virtuous populace. The reform societies conveniently addressed the various corruptions of society the New England clergy had been battling since the early seventeenth century, such as licentiousness, greed, drunkenness, impiety and luxury.

²⁵⁸ Stout, *The New England Soul*, 3.

²⁵⁹ Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered . . . May 9, 1798*, 21.

²⁶⁰ Mintz, "The Promise of the Millennium," 167.

For example, the temperance movement engaged one such vice and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was largely dominated by the respectable social elite who losing influence. In its inception, “the movement was a means for a declining social elite to retain its diminishing power- by making over Americans ‘into a clean, sober, godly, and decorous people.’”²⁶¹ The clerical participation in reform movements benefited both the clergy and the reformers. “The clergy provided an aura of divine approval to such organizations while gaining in return a measure of social status,” and perhaps more importantly, a measure of social influence.

The language the *Panoplist* used to describe the danger of intemperance is strongly reminiscent of the Bavarian Illuminati jeremiads. According to the *Panoplist*, intemperance was “spreading over the face of the whole country, threatening to sweep away, in its course the strongest bulwarks of religion and government.”²⁶² Thus, the orthodox clergy had not abandoned their quest to create a New Jerusalem in America; rather they had repackaged their message to fit the currents of American culture. The refashioning of the jeremiad to fit within the structure of the American reform movement does not represent a defeat, but rather a change in tactics. Still the social watchmen the orthodox clergy remained committed to their original ideals

Let this religion then, which strengthens all the motives of virtue; binds together the members of society, and whose doctrines and precepts tend in the highest degree to promote universal happiness, be the “anchor of all our hopes; and let us never forget the inseparable connection from the *virtues* that flow from it, and the prosperity of our country.”²⁶³

²⁶¹ John W. Crowley, “Introduction” in *The Drunkard’s Progress: Narratives of Addiction, Despair, and Recovery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 4.

²⁶² *Panoplist* 8 (1812-1813): 416.

²⁶³ Morse, *A Sermon . . . April 25th, 1799*, 24.

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